Evolving Spirituality
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Dedication

To the three stars of the constellation
Family
Rose Marie, Carolyn and Daniel,
risen above my horizon
not only to grace the time
but to signify direction for a journey
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The Way Ahead</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 What is Religion?</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dimensions of Religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Psychology and Religion:</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Historical Overview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Religion as Development:</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Contributions of Allport, Maslow,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erikson, and Fowler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 A Theory for Understanding Religious and</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Development: An Introduction to Positive Disintegration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Positive Disintegration and Religious</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 What is Morality?</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 What Does Religion Have to do With Morality?</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Theories of Justification</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 In the Full Current of Life: Character</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 True Values, Right Action</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

My story is written on shorelines of Cambrian seas,
Engraved on rocks under ancient ice.
It is vast; I small
Its time endless; mine not so
nevertheless
It is my story.

This is written in the mountains. The stream that rushes past my campsite tumbles to the Pacific. Not too far away, another brook sets out for the Atlantic. This place is called the Great Divide. It has for aeons been a dividing place. It was long ago the shoreline separating land and sea. There was an explosion of living things here in the beginnings of the earth. Five hundred, thirty million years ago, strange creatures slithered and swam, walked and wobbled here in warm, tropical seas. All perished, most leaving no line; some left only delicate impressions of their mysterious presence in the fragile bodies in the sand of a collapsing primeval shore. Stopped suddenly in their time, they were somehow cherished by the earth and later lifted up through enormous powers over more aeons to mountain heights far above the old seas. Some of them had primitive backbones—something like the strong, supple ones humans have today.

People live here now in little villages. Trains trundle over the Great Divide with wheat for China and autos from Japan; buses full of tourists pass through the valleys. Some see the mountains only behind glass; others stop to wonder. What are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?

This place is a dividing place;
There is a terrible beauty here.
It is not to be passed over lightly.

This is not a book of paleontology; it is a book of psychology. As such it needs a context, a place both personal and objective. The place of psychology is within the living drama of process, a process of today but rich with the resources of “before” and open to the possibilities of “not yet.” A sense of time and place is important in life and in psychology. Where I am is an outcome of where I have been and where I intend to go. It is my continuing story; it is also the story of the cosmos. Recently we have been reminded (sometimes sharply by catastrophes) of our interconnectedness not only with other humans but with our planet earth. Psychology can be enriched by that awareness; morality is full of it, and religion, especially as it reaches out into its spiritual dimensions, can be enlightened by a new parable responding to the ancient question “Who is my neighbor?”
Chapter 5
A Theory for Understanding Religious and Moral Development: An Introduction to Positive Disintegration

Because religion is not only theological but also psychological—a developing aspect of the personality—we need a comprehensive or "grand" psychological theory to explain how religious development comes about and how we might encourage it toward the higher reaches of human nature. Clearly the traditional psychoanalytic and behavioristic theories are not suitable, nor are theories built primarily on cognitive themes of an organism merely seeking equilibrium; they would hardly reflect religion's dynamic movement toward that which is higher; or morality's ever-questing urge toward that which is better. These theories are not holistic, and, as Pearce says (1992, p. 221), "To become whole all parts must be left behind, for a whole is not the sum of its parts, but a different state entirely." Religion at its best is a search for wholeness, a quest for ultimates, the ineffable, the transpersonal, and the highest of moral endeavors. Only a holistic theory with a sense of this quest for the highest of human endeavors has within itself the measure of these goals and the potential to draw a life map for the pilgrim. On the moral side, only a theory with a strong sense of values can direct the quester to what is truly worthwhile. Only a theory with a realistic sense of the difficulties of the journey—the painful, the tragic—can promise hope to find some order in the sometimes painful chaos of individual development. These characteristics, I contend, are found, at least potentially, in the theory of Positive Disintegration proposed by Kazimierz Dabrowski (1967, 1970, 1972, 1973), Dabrowski, Kawczak, and Piechowski (1970), and by his daughter (Dabrowski, 1993).

Up to this point we have examined the ideas and shared the experiences of eminent theologians, philosophers, psychologists, and scientists as they explored the development of religion and morality within the individual and within society. Some are philosophical speculations with implications for...
developmental psychology; some are psychological theories with developmental aspects; some are theories of developmental psychology with implications for religious and moral development. It is to this latter category we return now: a developmental psychology theory, which although not explicitly a theory of religious and moral development has profound and far-reaching implications for the holistic development of persons.

The theory we turn to now is known as Positive Disintegration. It is a developmental theory particularly relevant to religious and moral development. The Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) is a grand, all-encompassing, theory of how humans develop. I consider it a grand theory not only because Dabrowski was concerned with the whole person, but because its foundational philosophy is clearly stated, its image of full humanness worked out, and its appreciation of health and sickness plainly explicated so that one can see the values on which it is built. Its scope is so vast, its depth so profound, its implications so telling for our present topics that we will spend considerable time in exploring it in depth, looking first at the theory in general as proposed by its author, Kazimierz Dabrowski, and then at the specific implications of the theory for religious and moral development and ultimately for religious and moral education. Because so much of theory—particularly psychological theory, comes not just from the head but from the heart of its author, I am convinced that a theory is best appreciated by those who have first an image of the kind of person who conceived it.

Kazimierz Dabrowski and His Developmental Theory

Kazimierz Dabrowski was born in Poland in 1902, studied in Europe, and suffered through the atrocities of two World Wars. It was this combination of high academic scholarship and deep personal participation in the realities of the world at some of its ugliest moments that brought him the understanding and sensibilities to build a profound and meaningful theory of human development.

Professor Dabrowski studied both medicine and education before receiving his MD at the University of Geneva. In 1931 he received his PhD in psychology at Poznan University, a certificate of psychoanalytic studies at Vienna (under Wilhelm Stekel), and a certificate of the School of Public Health at Harvard in 1934. He studied under Clapared and Jean Piaget and established an institute of mental hygiene at Warsaw in 1935. After World War II and his imprisonment during the Nazi occupation of Poland, he was awarded a “habilitation in psychiatry” at the University of Wroclaw. He was professor of experimental psychology at Warsaw in 1956 and at the Polish Academy of Sciences until 1958. From 1964 until 1979 he was a professor and Director of Clinical Research and Internship at the University of Alberta in Canada, and from 1968 a visiting professor at Laval University, Quebec. In 1979 he returned to Poland and died there in 1980. In his lifetime he wrote more than 38 books and 253 other publications, in English, Polish, and French. Centers for the study of his theory are located throughout Canada, the United States, South America, and Europe. Those of us who were fortunate enough to meet Dr. Dabrowski, first as his students and then as his colleagues in developing the theory, were impressed by the quiet humility of the man, his scholarship and hard work, and above all the depths of feeling that made possible a theory of psychological development that speaks so well to the human condition.

My own memories of Kazimierz Dabrowski are not confined to the innumerable pages of handouts in purple mimeograph ink we shared in each weekly seminar where we explored new aspects of his theory as he developed them in his senior years. My personal memories are of a gentlemanly scholar not given to small talk, not lapsing into personal narrative, but flowing from a wellspring of thought and life experience that gave rise to a mystique of reticence. There was always another depth to be explored. He was single-minded and consumed with the development of “the theory.” My memories too are of the “taste-full” evenings at the Dabrowski home, talking, of course, about the theory as we devoured elaborate Polish dishes graciously presented by his wife and daughters.

The Theory

Let us begin the study where religion, morality, and the individual intersect: in mystery. It is, after all, at the heart of this psychology. First, the title of the theory—Positive Disintegration—is somewhat baffling. It is more mystical than simply mysterious. Like so many terms Dabrowski used, it contains within it a delightful paradox, a seeming contradiction. Positive Disintegration? How can falling apart be positive? Disintegration surely is a negative thing, simply a breakdown as in a “mental breakdown.” How can a breakdown, especially a mental breakdown, be something positive?

There is no denying the painfulness of all disintegration. Whatever its name, it hurts; sometimes it crushes. But Dabrowski says it can be positive when it leads to growth. If the outcome of the falling apart is a putting together as something better, then even the pain of disintegration takes on a positive aspect. Disintegration, he says, is an opportunity, an open doorway toward growth. Even more, it is a precondition for growth; it is, in fact, necessary or there will be no growth, just stagnation. Disintegration is not something we grow in spite of; it is something we grow because of. It is a profound fact of the human condition.

We can go back far beyond Dabrowski to the experience of mankind through the ages to find an appreciation of this mystery. We find the springs of understanding the mystery of disintegration in mankind’s most primitive and highest experiences of the cosmos. A pervading theme of philosophy, myth, literature, and religion has been the birth of life from death, of growth from decay, of joy from pain. People saw this in nature as
winter yielded to spring in the cycle of the seasons, as children were born to pain, as food was consumed to give life, as wheat sprang from the fertile soil.

Ancient peoples, aware of the mysteries of death and resurrection, celebrated it in their religious rites and depicted it in their arts. They vivified it in the myth of the Phoenix, a great, beautiful bird. When it felt its death impending it collected aromatic plants and made a nest. Then it set fire to the nest, and a new Phoenix arose from the ashes. They humanized it in the fertility cults of Catal Huyuk, and the prehistoric goddesses who united not only divinity and humanity, but life and death. The goddess was a projection of mankind’s wonder in the midst of the unfolding of nature’s cycles and human cycles within them. The ancient Egyptians looked up into their blue desert sky, and seeing the sun dominating all, worshipped it. In this mighty presence they saw the power of the mystery of life and death. They chose to live on the east bank of the Nile where the sun rose. They carried their dead across in boats to the west and buried them where the sun set. The pyramids stand on the west bank as enduring monuments to mankind’s aspirations to some kind of afterlife.

The Book of Job is a classic exploration of the mystery of suffering and evil. In the New Testament Jesus drew from an ancient wisdom when he said (John 12:24), “In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies yields a rich harvest.” Paul repeated the theme in 1 Corinthians 15:36: “What you sow must die before it is given new life.” Life comes not despite but through death; growth comes not despite disintegration but through disintegration. Order comes not despite chaos, but out of chaos.

Just as our ancestors found mystery in the natural things of their day, we find it in nature. Loddicepole pine seeds germinate only after the conflagration of a forest fire has released them to be nurtured by the ashes of the old forest. Tiny, green, fragile sprouts, destined to be giant redwoods, grow from rotting trunks of dead trees. It seems that life and death are not opposite poles, miles apart at the extremes of some dichotomy, but rather partners, dancing an eternal cyclical dance together in a dance called the process of the world, the ongoings of the universe.

It is a mystery full of hope for what ultimately may be, but on the dark side pointing to the necessity of pain now. Religion at its best addresses mystery not by rationalizing it away, but by giving perspective, perceiving the basic paradox—the seeming absurdity that reveals a deeper truth. In the mystery of death, pain, and suffering the paradox is that the power to give life is found, surprisingly, not outside but within the mystery of death itself. Life constantly surprises us by appearing in the most unlikely places.

In sum, the transcendent paradox of paradoxes running as a theme through the great mysteries is that “opposites” are not opposites at all, but partners. The mystery of death is entwined with the mystery of life, its origins and growth. Life and death dance together at the stillpoint of the turning wheel. Suffering, disintegration, death, in and through their lethal powers, have paradoxically a higher power—the power to give life.

**Disintegration in Life**

The evidence is present not only in nature. The realities of disintegration and rebirth are there in the experience of some men and women. Most of these are themselves “sick souls” in James’s sense, not satisfied with trite or reassuring explanations of the world around them that eliminate the pain or wipe it away in a rationalization. Some labor with the mystery of suffering and find it something not to be fled from, but embraced because it is the stuff of creativity and growth and life itself. One of these suffering souls was Kazimierz Dabrowski, surveying the dead and maimed and dying on the battlefields of Europe, experiencing the inhumanity of man toward man in concentration camps, and sensitive to his own inner hurts, but conscious of the need of others. He translated his life experience and learning into a theory that has profound implications for understanding the human condition and drawing from it an optimum of growth and an optimum of human consciousness.

By pointing out that the actions we perform, the attitudes we have, and the words we use to describe them have many levels, Dabrowski opened up a new way of looking at the psychology of human development. As a practicing physician Dabrowski saw something many others still do not see: he saw growth sometimes coming out of the turmoil others called psychoneurosis. He became convinced that psychoneurosis is not an illness, but an opportunity for development. I have found in my work as a counseling psychologist that when people, particularly those who experience pain in their lives, hear of the theory, their response is a strong “Yes” of recognition. “Yes, that makes so much sense to me.” “Yes, that’s the story of my life.” “Yes, that gives me some hope that the hell I’m going through right now might turn out to be positive in some way after all.” Dabrowski’s ideas are something many people can translate into the terms of their own lives.

Dabrowski was well aware that not all disintegrations are positive, not all breakdowns act in the service of increased psychological development. In contrast to positive disintegration where developmental dynamisms (which we shall look at later) are active, negative disintegration is characterized by the lack of such dynamisms. In other words, some people have within themselves the potential to turn a disintegration into a positive growth experience; other people do not have such a potential and may well be slow, paralyzingly hesitant, fearful, or so unaware that they remain even static, lacking in development. Drawing on his own personal experiences and his practice as a clinician over many years, Dabrowski noted that there seemed to be striking differences in the way individuals reacted to the various events of their lives. Some, he noted, experienced the death of someone close in a bland, concrete, and literal way; others tended to take the experience of the
death of a loved one and transform it, deepening the experience, plumbing its depths, developing it into a complex significant, intense, and yet enhancing experience. Some people just seemed to be more sensitive to their experiences and more able and willing to have the experiences reach the depths of their psyche and stir them up. Out of these observations grew the concept of “overexcruciation” — another Dabrowskian concept we shall see more of later on.

We may trace back Dabrowski’s appreciation of the necessity of crisis in life not only to his personal experiences, but also to his European origins. Although Dabrowski reacted strongly to Freud’s reductionistic psychology, he carried over into TPD a tragic sense of conflict that was central to Freud. Many North American psychologies, although they have roots in Freud, have parcelled out this role of conflict in development, preferring instead the doctrine of the more romantic Human Potential movements, which often promise development without pain.

Physician though he was, he had a vision over and beyond the traditional medical paradigm in which health and disease vie for dominance; where health is stability and the absence of crisis, and disease is instability and the presence of crisis. Dabrowski’s paradigm, on the other hand, envisions health as the fluid ability to alternate between psychological stability and crisis, while disease is being locked in chronic crisis or a stuckness at the lowest levels of development.

Put simply, then, development accompanies disintegration that is positive; on the other hand, dissolution of mental functions accompanies negative disintegration. Both are a falling apart. For the latter the dissolution is chronic, unproductive, and never-ending; for the former a breakdown is an opportunity, a new beginning. An opportunity can be lost, discarded in a dump where it perishes, or grasped, used to realize the better and to create the new and the not-yet-imagined.

**Multilevelness**

Developmental psychologists are like mapmakers; they picture the layout of the land and describe the routes one may take in traversing it. Their maps are three-dimensional, topographical, because they usually describe the process of development in terms of moving upward through stages or levels. Most stage theories are ontological; they emphasize normal growth and development over time. One can expect a child of a certain age to have developed to a point in common with other children of his or her own age in similar circumstances. These are the stages of normal development that all parents watch for in their offspring, and that doting parents seem to discover earlier in their own children than we do in other people’s.

Dabrowski uses levels in this sense of progression over time; but he uses it in another important sense of levels of quality or value. He points out the higher value of some levels over others without stressing so much the factor of time as the fact that the higher level is in itself better. He stresses development upward through higher and better values. Dabrowski’s levels are based not just on an ordinal scale of “later,” but on a value scale of “better.” If we stress the betterness of the higher level without tying it so closely to time, we step beyond stages and chronology. This allows us to apply the idea of levels not only to stage development, but to describing human behavior and organizations. We take the very ideas we have about the qualities we see in humans and distinguish levels of behavior within a single concept. Ideas, thoughts, human behaviors themselves have levels. They are so rich with values that we can call them multileveled. Take a word such as love. At lower levels sexual energy, sometimes going under the name of love, is simply given a physical outlet without consideration for the other. In fact, the only “personal” relationship involved may be the exploitation of power over the more vulnerable one treated as an object. Sexuality at higher levels is enriched by care, concern, responsibility, and respect in a manner that is truly interpersonal. The personal relationship in turn is enriched in the form of a lasting relationship. There is a vast difference in the meaning given to the word love when we use it to describe an exploitative “one-night stand” and the deep, caring relationship of a couple that has grown over 50 years. One can take many other words and find multiple levels of meaning within them. Dabrowski and Piechowski (1977) describe a number of functions, outlining the levels that exist in them when seen through the eyes of multilevelness. One example is levels of smiling. There is a vast difference, obviously, between the smile of a villain and the smile of a loving grandparent. Dabrowski makes even more subtle distinctions of levels of smiling, moving from the cynical and threatening to the empathic and caring the smile that says: “I am one with you.”

Behavior (and consequently the organizations shaped by behavior) are no longer seen as simply unilevel, like a carton of milk—homogeneous throughout. We can look at concepts such as health, happiness, and love, and see they are not monolithic, uniform throughout, but that there are various levels within each of them according to the higher level of values a particular behavior represents. TPD gives us the criteria to distinguish these value shades of meaning by indicating new facets. It is like the experience of a gem cutter who takes a large, rather dull-looking stone, strikes it with precisely calculated blows, and releases the glorious variety of a million new, sparkling facets. Ideas, like diamonds, must be looked at and admired from many perspectives. Ideas thus take on new dimensions of meaning. Behaviors take on new subtleties. Psychological nuances abound. Institutions like the family, education, health care, and religion can be more fully understood. Multilevelness as a value-differentiating concept is an exciting paradigm, naming criteria by which to measure a number of concepts by exploring the levels within them. Problems of semantics yield when we sharpen terms with the tool of multilevelness. Our everyday vocabulary and
grasp of what is going on in life at myriad levels are expanded by a multilevel appreciation. The introduction of more precise criteria makes more meaningful research possible. Piechowski says:

It now becomes less meaningful to consider for instance aggression, inferiority, empathy, or sexual behavior as unitary phenomena, but it becomes more meaningful to examine different levels of these behaviors. Through this approach we may discover that there is less difference between the phenomenon of love and the phenomenon of aggression at the lowest level of development than there is between the lowest and highest levels of love and the lowest and highest levels of aggression. (1977, p. 12)

Let’s explore the roots of this cardinal idea, multilevelness, for much does hinge on it. Multilevelness has its foundation in biology. Late 19th-century findings in neurology demonstrated a biological hierarchy in the nervous system, suggesting that evolution is a passage from the simplest to the more complex, from the most automatic to the more voluntary. From this Dabrowski articulated a hierarchical classification of the levels of mental organization. Each level represents a distinct constellation of intrapsychic processes. This gives us an opportunity to peel away the skin of mere “stages” of development and of seemingly univocal concepts and explore the dynamics operating within.

As development proceeds, developmental structures at the lower levels become progressively subordinate to and integrated by higher-level structures. This process by which more simple, reflexive, unconscious, and automatic lower functions become subordinate to and integrated by more complex, inhibiting, conscious, and voluntary higher functions is a biological face of the term multilevelness. Its levels range beyond the biological and encompass the inner conflicts that one feels on a subjective, personal level between what one is and what one ought to be. Behind it all is the valuing process embodied in a dynamism (which we will see later) called hierarchization, the construction of priorities in one’s life and the active pursuit of them.

Multilevelness is a concept that does not exist in other theories of development, at least not as elaborately developed as in TPD. Most other theories recognize that development goes through a process of ascending levels, but to appreciate that those things that make up the psychological, moral, religious, personal, social, political world as we know it are describable as having levels within them from “lower” to “higher” is a special contribution. It is a matter of seeing behaviors no longer as monoliths, but as complex structures patterned with subtly different levels. Ideas become beautifully complex, behaviors immensely rich. When you examine them closely they yield a plethora of various meanings, and these meanings are not haphazard, but arrange themselves, like ice crystals on a window pane,

into a pattern. The pattern is orchestrated by values. The pattern in turn displays the values.

Seen from a distance, the pyramids of Egypt look like three great triangular monoliths; but closer up one can appreciate the row on row of ascending levels that make up their design and direction, telling us much about the people who built them.

The Role of Conflict

Crisis—The Play between Continuity and Discontinuity—Integration and Disintegration

Implicit in what we have just looked at is the idea that development does not come without a price. If there are levels in development, there must be some forces that move us from lower to higher. Some are external, in the environment; some are within.

Certainly growing as a human being can be deeply joyous and rewarding, but never effortless. Sometimes it is hard to let go of the old and comfortable and to risk the new and unfamiliar even if we know it is in itself better. If there is to be progress in development through levels, there is bound to be conflict—between the old and the new, between the inferior and the better—if a new integration is to come from disintegration. We can now approach closer to an exploration of Dabrowski’s actual levels of development by seeing the process of multilevel development as an interplay, a dance, of disintegration and integration. Some definition of terms would help.

Integration is the continuing articulation of more and more complex organization. TPD distinguishes two levels of integration: They occupy extreme ends of the levels of development: the lowest, primary integration, and the highest, secondary integration. Both are characterized by feelings of well-being, contentment, and absence of conflict. But what differences between the two? The first is marked by rigidity; the second by integrity. Primary integration has a rock-like quality: unperturbed, unmovable complacency with the way things are, egocentrism that little gets through to disturb. The wholeness of secondary integration, on the other hand, is not egocentric but a profound and peaceful appreciation of all that is, realizing full well that all is not as it should be, but knowing that what ought to be has been realized in some way in one’s life.

Disintegration. Traditionally, the term disintegration implies abnormality, even pathology. Out of conflict comes disequilibrium. Instead of seeing the disturbance as bad, TPD presents it as an opportunity. The breakdown of a previous lower level is the necessary precondition for reorganization at a higher level. This disintegration is positive if it is directed by developmental dynamics and serves development, leading to freedom, creativity, and the ability to turn outward. Disintegration is negative if it is diffusive of the
person. Negative disintegration is limiting of relationships and productivity, involving impoverishment of emotional and intellectual functioning and the fearful avoidance of risks because the individual is preoccupied with self-survival.

Often these challenges of what is higher to what is lower take place in a crisis situation. A crisis must be understood as a developmental situation. It is true that crisis often means a catastrophe ending in disaster, but Dabrowski's view is much broader, seeing a crisis as a turning point, a life passage great or small, where the person is vulnerable it is true, where the risk of catastrophe is there to some degree, but above all where the psychic structures of the person are loosened, pulled apart, with the potential for putting them back together again at a higher level. It seems to me that these crises are of two main kinds: developmental and accidental. By developmental I mean crises that occur as part of the human process of growing up and are tied largely to biological development. For example, Dabrowski points out these are the crisis of the age of opposition of the two-year-old, the crisis of adolescence, and of menopause. About the age of two the child begins to assert his autonomy in a special way. It usually comes out in using the word No over and over again. By saying "No" the child asserts that he can go a direction other than that asked of him. By doing this he asserts his independence and develops his budding autonomy. It is a "crisis" period because the child must find his autonomy, his self in relationship to someone who will at one and the same time offer a stable platform against which to react negatively. It is also a crisis for adults who are called on to give a warm, loving acceptance to the little person who tests their patience by rebelling in this way.

Adolescence is a crisis period brought on by biological and social maturation, and, as Erik Erikson points out, it is a crisis of identity—discovering who I am now that my body has changed so much, where have I come from and where am I going. Menopause is also a biologically induced crisis brought on by aging. It again is a crisis of generativity, not just in the sexual sense, but in the whole sense of where do I belong in a world where I have for so long been able to keep pace as a producer, and in a world that idolizes youth and demands productivity in a materialistic sense?

The second major category of crises that Dabrowski includes as opportunities for positive disintegration are not necessarily connected with biological turning points in life. They are crises that occur to some and not to others: the death of a loved one, personal illness, moving to a new city, going into a new job, falling in love, getting married, having a baby, failing an exam. I have deliberately mixed together positive and negative examples of crisis to bring out the point that a crisis is not just a negative affair. It is any turning point in life that stimulates a pulling apart of what we have been and opens the door to being something new and better. A crisis need not be of major proportions either. The death of a child may shatter one's world and bring one into questions of the meaning of life that run deep and hurt bitterly. But being asked by a hobo on the street for a dollar "for a cup of coffee" can also be a mild challenge to one's principles and how one relates to people and their needs. Even a small moment that interrupts the way we have put our lives or our day together and demands some sort of restructuring is a challenge to reconfigure on a higher level.

It should be clear from what has been said thus far that Positive Disintegration is a theory that presents development as a continuous evolution, a process ever going onward. It is not a theory that proposes some sort of state of "perfection" as the ultimate goal of development, nor does it strive for an ultimate maturity. Maturity is a term borrowed from physiology. A person grows to his "mature height" and then stops growing. But Dabrowski does not use the word maturity; instead, he talks of integration, of which we will see more later on.

What Makes TPD Different? A Comparison with Other Theories

TPD is not an easy theory to grasp; it is complex; it is also unique, quite different from many other theories. It would be good now to look at some things which make it singular.

The promise of possibilities. Most theories of how humans develop are traditional, ontogenetic, a way of explaining the normal life process of the majority of individuals as physical growth and psychological maturation unfold. They chart the course of individuals in a particular culture go through. Progress is usually measured in stages: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and so on. Dabrowski's theory is not like this.

If Dabrowski's developmental sequence is not traditional ontogenesis. what is it? It is an evolutionary theory about possibilities—human possibilities—how they come around, how they are created, how they are selected, and the further possibilities that come from choosing initial opportunities. It describes possible paths life can take and it maps responses to them. It especially emphasizes paths toward the ideal. They are like routes up a mountain, some to sheltered alpine meadows filled with frail flowers, others to craggy, windswept heights far above the treeline. There are possibilities of moving on up; possibilities of getting stuck; the possibility of not even starting the climb or starting and then turning back. Above all, this theory describes the prospect at the summit of the mountain. It uses the words and reports the experiences of the eminent men and women who have been there to describe not only the vista, but the journey to get to it. It maps the actual ascent in terms of five levels. During his or her lifetime, a given individual may pass through none or only part of the theory's developmental sequence. In fact, the theory says there may be little or no movement at all; the lowest level of development is characterized by stagnation, compli-
cency, lack of movement. Some are, it seems, satisfied with that. Others may begin to develop, find it too threatening or too painful, and lapse back into something more comfortable. But the outward routes have been mapped by Dabrowski and they are challenges. That is what a good theory, like a good map, should do, entice one to go onward in the journey with some challenging anticipation of what may lie ahead.

The moving on is not without its demands. Dabrowski’s theory is distinguished among psychological theories by its call to high standards. It stands out too by its acknowledgment of the tragic sense of crisis in life. It describes a course of action with increasingly higher standards as one progresses. The psychological rites of passage are crises. Crises are breakdowns and undeniably painful, but they create room for heroism, high virtue, and high purpose in life. High ideals make strong demands. All this in the name of achieving higher goals that may be recognized as spiritual—goals that many other psychologies may ignore or, if they reference them at all, it is by way of pointing to their unreality in an effort to pull us back to the “realities” of utilitarianism. An “easy” way is advertised. Some charlatans even promise that all can be done in the course of one “intensive” weekend workshop.

William James (1958), in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, had an appreciation of how tempting the easy way is. He made his famous distinction between the “healthy-minded” and the “sick-souled.” The healthy-minded, “who live habitually on the sunny side of the misery line” while the sick-souled “live beyond it in darkness and apprehension ... born close to the pain threshold which the slightest irritants fatally send them over.”

Our reaction to James’ distinction may well be a spontaneous urge to choose, if we could, the religion of the “healthy-minded.” It sounds more positive and certainly more pleasant. But James is using “sick” in a different way that puts “sickness” of this sort in a much more positive light. He contrasts the two approaches another way, giving each a second name. The healthy soul is the “once-born,” the sick soul is the “twice-born.” The once-born are not deeply reflective, nor are they particularly distressed by their own imperfections. They read the character of God not in the disordered world of mankind, but in the romantic and harmonious world of nature as they see it. But the sick soul is discontented and must be born again in order to be fulfilled. Not blind, like the once-born to the evils of the world, the sick soul is very aware of the injustices around and within him or her. Deep reflection on the human condition brings anguish over the evils humans create for one another and for their planet. This is not mere morbidity, perpetual depression, or obsession with sin; rather, it is vivid awareness of evil and injustice, and inner turmoil and profound regret that the world is not a perfect place. The hand he or she has had, even by default, in this imperfection troubles the sick soul. Melancholy and a self-critical condition motivate him or her to undergo a search for self-transformation. It is a trouble that does not simply feed on its own gloom, but aspires to something better,

... some ideal state, and goes beyond mere aspirations to vigorous striving for the ideal. For the twice-born life is struggle, but this is the more productive way because, as James says, it is “based on the persuasion that the evil aspects of our life are of its very essence, and that the world’s meaning most comes home to us when we lay them most to heart.” Somewhere the sick soul discovers that the pain itself has promise, that agony and death are necessary for resurrection, that joy is the by-product of meaning found in suffering, that there is life and a terrible beauty even in deformity.

Charles Taylor (1989), criticizing some current psychologies that make the cardinal mistake of believing that a good is invalidated if it leads to suffering, says:

Prudence constantly advises us to scale down our hopes and circumscribe our vision. But we deceive ourselves if we pretend that nothing is denied thereby of our humanity ... Do we have to choose between various kinds of spiritual labotomy and self-inflicted wounds? Perhaps. Certainly most of the outlooks which promise us that we will be spared these choices are based on selective blindness. (p. 520)

The mills of the gods grind slowly, and the gods have their demands.

The movement is evolutionary. Human development is a process in which homeostasis and equilibrium are only temporary interstices in a larger process that has all the dynamism of evolution. Personal development is participation in the evolution of the cosmos itself. Our earth has gone through an evolution involving the upheaval of continents, the slow emergence of life that moved from simple living things to more and more complex life, and then through a development of human knowledge and understanding that has itself become more differentiated, more complex, and yet more articulated and organized. The same evolutionary principles apply to the process of human individual development, beginning in relative simplicity and moving on to complexity, organized by systems of values.

Quality is the measure. Many developmental theories are organized into systems, but they are based on quantity. When you get to a higher stage you have “more of” something: more muscle power, more information. That quantitative increase is part of development. But the other aspect is an improvement in quality: better coordination, improved learning skills, for example. When you talk about quality you are into values, judgments about desirability and worthwhileness. Quality statements don’t ask simply “Is it bigger?” They ask, and try to find the answer, “Is it better?” Positive Disintegration is a quality-based theory; it asks questions about worthwhileness; it measures development with the yardstick of value; it has, unlike quantitative theories such as Behaviorism, no difficulty proposing that a “higher” level is a “better” level.

Higher is better, not just later. There is a hint in the vertical metaphor of climbing that I have used of something so basic to the theory of Positive
Disintegration that it may be passed over without being noticed. Like other developmentalists, Dabrowski constantly referred to higher and lower levels of maturity, of course, being the better ones. Some theories work on the presumption that later is better for the simple reason that it is more mature. This notion of maturity is all right when you are talking about physical growth; people grow to a mature height and then don’t grow any more. But the plateau of maturity fails to describe the infinite possibilities of human development in which the process never stops. TPD does not use the term ‘maturity’ because it connotes growing to a certain level and then staying there, like someone settling in on a plateau. TPD describes, instead, a process toward integration. Thus Dabrowski’s stages, as we will see, are higher levels not simply because they are later, but because they are in themselves better—clarified by the values they represent. The higher levels are more worthwhile because they express higher-level values. To put it another way: A higher stage is not a higher stage simply because it comes later; Dabrowski’s later levels come only later because they are higher in terms of values.

Self-actualization. Dabrowski reacted to truncated behavioristic and psychoanalytic theories limited to lower-level instinctive and defense needs; instead, he emphasized actualization needs and constructed actualization hierarchies. In this his ideas converge with Abraham Maslow’s, but in a deeper understanding of self-actualization within a value hierarchy. Dabrowski emphasized the role of value hierarchies in organizing development. The term hierarchy, however, can carry with it connotations of rigidity, a rule from the top down in the rigid sense that values could be set once and for all into some unchangeable order. The theory of Positive Disintegration does not insist on hierarchies of values as rigid rank orders. Values are in dynamic tension with each other and with the life situation in which they are called on to play their discriminating role. Rigid hierarchies tend to be domination hierarchies. Partnership values, on the other hand, explore their fullest potential to be in hierarchical, actualization partnership and, with this, explore and expand the human actualization partnership potential.

Emotion has a valued place. While we are looking at basic themes of TPD and comparing it with other well-known theories of development, we should check first the place Dabrowski gave to the emotions. The titles of many of his papers and books emphasize emotional functioning, emotional development. This is in contrast to major cognitive theories such as those of Piaget and Kohlberg. It is comparatively easy to measure cognitive development using standardized measures such as IQ tests. But Dabrowski, convinced of the central role of emotion in human development, took the more difficult, riskier, and I think more telling route of giving prime place to the emotions. For him it was not an either-or proposition, throwing out the rational in order to put all emphasis on feeling. Dabrowski appreciated the power of emotions, acknowledging the possibility of guidance coming from higher-level emotions. He emphasized that to be authentic, to be a guide, emotion must work in “equipotential collaboration” with cognition. Emotion is the most rational form of energy.

Autonomy. There is in TPD a strong stream of emphasis on autonomy not in the sense of isolation from others, but as the acceptance of responsibility, not only for one’s immediate actions, but (and this distinguishes TPD from many other theories) also for one’s development. This “autonomous factor” does not leave one the helpless victim of the circumstances of heredity and environment. Besides these two classical factors, there is what Dabrowski called the Third Factor. There is a large but not total element of choice, determining how one may develop and how high one may climb through levels. We are responsible; this responsibility is twofold: for our actions and ultimately for the direction, and in some degree for the extent of our development. “We are our choices,” say the existentialists. “You are responsible for the directions of your development,” says Dabrowski.

Positive Disintegration and women’s experience. Many theories of development have been conceived with men in mind; some, such as Kohlberg’s, were based entirely on research with a male population. The theory of Positive Disintegration favors neither sex. In its effort to describe the higher levels of human development it concentrates on those characteristics that mark the best human beings; both men and women belong to this group. Consequently, I believe it is one of the few theories of development that is especially sensitive to the female experience of life. If you look at the values of Positive Disintegration theory, if you explore its dynamisms, you will find that the goals and dynamisms that carry one upward are the values of a rich experience of not only what it is to receive life, but what it is to have the power to give it. Three value streams easily identified with women’s experience are present:

1. A respect for life as holistic. Once you see yourself in holistic terms—integral within oneself and integral within relationships—your attitude to self-development changes. If one’s concern is to be whole, then the criteria of personal worthwhileness one has constructed are different from those of simply playing a role (especially a dominating role) or, on the other hand, passively pleasing others. The measure of worthwhileness has been chosen and it is within. It is the ideal of the personal best.

2. An emphasis on the interpersonal. If human relationships are primary, then “things” take their appropriate place.

3. A penchant not just for knowing the good, but for actually doing it. If relationships take precedence, then synergistic morality guides behavior. There is nothing of aggression or competition with others in this theory, nothing of getting ahead in the world at all costs to others. There is, instead, a vibrant theme of the strength of a life lived in consonance with high values. Autonomy is linked with authenticity so...
that becoming independent of social influences is not understood as putting down other people. It is rather a joining at a deeper level.

TPD does not identify with the woman, but gives value to her natural attributes of nurture, tenderness, and relational importance, instead of viewing them as weaknesses.

The basic values of TPD are, I think, attractive to both men and women. But society attempts to socialize men in particular to a set of values in opposition. For men there is probably a greater need to overcome the forces of environment and socialization that have until recently encouraged a macho image, a domonator mentality, and a mystique of the machine. In their place TPD encourages freeing oneself from the limiting influences of environment, from lower-level drives, in favor of relationships of partnership. It is refreshing and ultimately satisfying to both sexes, fulfilling women’s needs and allaying men’s fears.

Interiority. Few psychological theories acknowledge reflection or interiority as a force in human nature. Some may use it as a device for gaining insight; fewer still recognize it as a quality with value in itself, something to be striven for on its own intrinsic worth. TPD sees it not only as a means to an end, but as a quality of higher levels of development. In psychotherapy it is more than the dialogue of client and therapist that works the “cure.” The dialogue is the condition, the reflective experience in relationship in which the therapist is the faithful mirror reflecting back the real self of the client so that he or she can see reality, accept it or reject it, and decide what should be done about it. It is in these two decisions—acceptance of reality and choice of appropriate action—that the client’s interiority comes into play. The best therapy is autopsychotherapy—done by the individual on himself or herself. Not all are capable of this inner dialogue with self. It requires, as we will see later, being both a subject and an object at the same time.

It is anagogic. A quality of TPD that is akin to interiority is its anagogic nature, that is, it describes the ascent to higher places not in a pedestrian use of “higher” as simply a step up, but in the Dantesque sense of the ascent of a spiritual mountain, reminiscent of the great spiritual mystics such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. If the mountain is spiritual, the quest is ultimately self-transcendence toward a oneness with all that is. Laurence Nixon (1990, 1994) has contributed his insights into the interconnectedness of TPD and the experiences of religious mystics.

The Foundational Values of TPD

Values direct our lives; exposing them reveals much about our claims. Values also direct psychologists when they make up theories indicating that some ways of being are higher and better than others. Behind each developmental theory there is a system of values, sometimes only implicit. These values need to be made explicit. Dabrowski was careful to make the foundational values of TPD clear. Figure 5.1 gives a list of personality charac-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Higher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological—psychophysical facticity</td>
<td>Suprabiological—higher reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive, unreflective, uninhibited</td>
<td>Conscious, reflective, appropriately inhibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment to “what is”</td>
<td>Quest for “What ought to be”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primitive, biological and instinctive</td>
<td>Idealistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heteronomous, socially determined</td>
<td>Autonomous, authentic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whimsical, narcissistic subjectivity</td>
<td>Objectivity through authentic subjectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reductionism: Human is “nothing but…”</td>
<td>Human continuous with creation, unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of lower instincts</td>
<td>Self-conscious and self-controlled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of heredity and environment</td>
<td>Self-determining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illusion</td>
<td>Authentic self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited concern for meaning</td>
<td>Meaning, purpose, ideals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egocentric</td>
<td>Self-transcending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid</td>
<td>Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Religion” structured for self-protection</td>
<td>Religion, personal, compassionate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1. Value determinants of levels.
The degree of psychological development that actually does occur in an individual's life span is a direct function of what Dabrowski called developmental potential. Developmental potential is the original endowment of a person that determines the level of development he or she may reach if the physical and environmental conditions are optimal. The characteristics that define it are the "dynamisms" and "overexcitabilities" that we are about to explore.

Challenges to Positive Disintegration come too from its seeming preoccupation with "higher" levels. It can be described as a "high end" theory. Clearly it does give much attention to the upper reaches of human development. It is unabashedly idealistic in the sense of aiming at higher levels of development, but not in any Pollyannaish sense that says, "You can be whatever you want to be, or as happy as you want to be." It is concerned primarily with what "ought to be because it is better." Basically, the movement from "is" to "ought" calls for a passage: What is (Realism), to what can be (Imagination), to what ought to be (Idealism).

This emphasis on betterness, combined with the limitations imposed by developmental potential, could suggest that this is an elitist theory, just for the gifted and privileged. It could be called elitist in the sense that it charts a course for becoming the best one can be. It is clearly not elitist in the sense that it does not base its criteria on social standing, financial position, or a snobbish intellectual elitism. Instead, it appeals to all to look at their values, choose consciously, and actively aspire to the better. The active desire for something truly better is a quest that transcends social class and education. In this quest the upper and middle classes have advantages: education and the luxury of time and money to explore "personal development." The marginal may be absorbed in the task of simply keeping alive, but this does not preclude the dynamisms of higher development. Developmental potential is personal, not a class thing.

As a physician, Dabrowski identified certain physiological characteristics and reactions related to developmental potential (compare Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977). His theories came to a large extent from studying the lives of eminent people. The presence or absence of these dynamisms and overexcitabilities is something that psychologists can identify, usually using analysis of written autobiographical statements. The possibility of measuring multilevel development qualitatively and even quantitatively in psychological research is opened up by the definition of these dynamisms and overexcitabilities. His criteria of how they are exhibited physiologically and psychologically have been the basis of the creative work of researchers such as Michael Piechowski and others in developing instruments to measure them. By distinguishing levels of development, by distinguishing and defining which forces (i.e., dynamisms) are active at each level as well as enumerating the channels of communication between the inner self and the outside world, Dabrowski has made it possible for researchers to measure fairly accurately and follow the developmental process of specific individuals. Empirically minded researchers today (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991; Piechowski, 1975, 1978, 1986, 1990, 1991; Piechowski & Tyska, 1982; Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Miller & Silverman, 1987) are able to measure and describe human development, particularly at its higher levels.

Five Levels of Development and their Dynamisms

The potential developmental passage can be described as five qualitatively different levels of development, each having a distinguishable personality organization. These are not the levels of development, a definitive statement of how "real" development comes about for humans. The claim is much humbler than that: no attempt is made to say that this template fits a universal process of human development. Quite the contrary; they describe the development of some, not everyone, and at the higher levels only a few. Piechowski (1975) says, "An individual developmental sequence may cover part of this scale, but none can cover its full extent" (p. 263). The following descriptions outline the levels of development and their interaction with certain dynamisms.

Dabrowski's Levels of Development

Level I: Primary Integration: A Rock, an Island

A stone is a symbol of primary integration. A rock, an island, the primary integrated person is egocentric, unreflective, and quite self-satisfied. Complacency or stickiness is the theme. Level one is characterized by the absence of drives toward development. There may be much motion but very little progress. Instead, the individual is busy with self-serving motives, possessiveness, and in personal relationships conflict, manipulation, superficiality, and insensitivity to others. Lack of reflectiveness, lack of awareness of an inner environment, and awareness of only an external environment mark this level. Although quarrelsomeness and conflicts with external problems may be present, there is an absence of internal conflicts as well as absence of guilt, and of intimate emotional relationships. A person may appear stable and adjusted to "what is," but this apparent adjustment is rigidly maintained and vulnerable to negative disintegration in conditions of stress or even relatively small change. One is narrowly concerned with the self in terms of one's biological functioning. Michael Piechowski (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977, p. 20) makes it clear that there are at least two forms of primary integration, one extreme, the other more "normal." The extreme form is exemplified by the psychopath; he has no consideration for others; he tends to exploit, humiliate, and take advantage of others. He can experience temperamental senility, an undifferentiated feeling of commonality with others engendered by group activities that are more of a gang type. One of the strongest bond-forming activities in his life is aggression against a com-
mon enemy. The inevitable fights express a gang camaraderie rather than true emotional relationships. The bond is largely external: race, color, blood, relationship, living in the same part of town. One gets the clear image here of black leather jackets being more of a bond than any real relationship. Reality, for the extreme case of primary integration, is looked at in immediate, tangible, sensory terms with no room for any deep appreciation. Moral thinking is on the level of mere avoidance of punishment. An action is moral only if you don’t get caught doing it.

Traumatic experiences, crises, don’t “get to” this kind of person. He or she has little or no sensitivity to experience emotional content or to appreciate the broader dimensions of what is going on immediately before or within him or her. When things go wrong, far from searching for any meaning in the situation, the blame is placed squarely where it belongs—on someone else.

Less dramatic perhaps than the psychopathic personality, yet much more ominous because of their quiet presence in large numbers is the mild form of primary integration described as “normal.” Though not totally without feeling, these people have a narrow range of interest, limited thinking, myopic philosophical vision, limited aspirations, and limited affect. They may acquire enough skills to meet the demands of the job market, but they tend to stagnate in a stereotyped role they have adopted for themselves. Problems can be solved by largely physical means such as moving to another house, another city, another job as long as the new does not make any great demands for change. Because problems appear to them to be “out there,” their solution to it is also “out there” in a change of environment, a change of friends, a change of job. Primary integrated persons are not feelingless, but the range of their feelings is limited, and the crises that tend to cause the greater upset are not the larger issues of life, and not those involving the well-being of others.

Television has exaggerated and exploited the primittively integrated person for his comic potential. The Homer Simpson-Archie Bunker type is most disturbed when his beer isn’t cold, his Twinkies aren’t in his lunch pail, or someone takes “his” chair. The death of a friend cannot, it seems, touch as deeply as these immediate and physical issues. If one is touched emotionally, the only resolution is a physical attack.

The level of moral reasoning corresponds most closely to Kohlberg’s good boy, good girl and law and order orientations. In both Dabrowski’s and Kohlberg’s schemata, individuals at these levels follow externally established rules. There is a similarity of this type with the authoritarian personality, governed by stereotypes and social prescriptions, as described by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950).

Level I, then, is characterized by absence of developmental dynamics such as appropriate feelings of guilt, reflectiveness, intimate emotional relationships, and absence of internal conflict with an awareness only of the external environment. A level I person may appear stable and adjusted, but this adjustment is rigidly maintained and vulnerable to negative disintegration when stress or change come from that external environment. The film The Deerhunter is a fine illustration of level I. Many of its soldier characters are superficial good buddies who remain unchanged by the horrors of Viet Nam.

Level II, Unilevel Disintegration: Pulled in Every Direction

The passage from primary integration to this first level of disintegration is of major proportions. Inner psychic life begins to blossom in a state of turmoil and fragmentation (“I feel confused and shattered”). At this level hesitation, doubt, and ambivalence begin to take over and the person becomes less stable. Moods oscillate; actions vacillate. Inner conflict begins. Sometimes it is a conflict of values. However, without hierarchical (vertical) values, the conflict is merely horizontal, a conflict between equal, competing values. Without a clear sense of what is more worthy of valuing, there are no rules for settling the conflict in terms of what should be. Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina, paralyzed by her own vacillations, is a classic example of this level.

The rigid organization of level I is broken down, and yet there is no preexisting hierarchical organization to give the individual a sense of direction; hence the risk of developing the most severe forms of psychopathology. Loosened structures tend to come apart under the impact of emotion and stress. Self-insight is still weak, as is the capacity for inner psychic transformation of conflicts. Rather than being transformed into higher levels, tensions must be released or converted. If they are transposed to the body, psychosomatic disorders arise. If they are externalized, they appear as projections, reality distortions, or hallucinations. Guilt feelings do not yet have a creative dynamic, but are passive, founded on lack of self-acceptance that one may trace back to lack of love in childhood. Guilt at this level is not the key to higher levels of moral thinking. Instead, it is debilitating, a dead end.

Because from this passive position values are seen as arbitrary, relative, and externally determined, one takes the moral view that what is good is what works (utilitarianism) and that the majority rules in determining morals.

Piechowski says:

The degree of instability varies in level II and as a result this level has the most multiform structure of all the levels. It encompasses total mental fragmentation as in psychosis and drug-induced states, a middle range of more stereotyped forms of behavior—inferiority toward others, dependency, need to conform, seeking approval and admiration—and at the other extreme partially integrated forms that convey a certain degree of stability, even maturity. Because of the lack of direction, inner organization, incapacity for inner psychic transformation, blindness to a larger sense of order, especially in regard to human experience, and blindness to universal values and their hierarchy, we can justifiably depict this type of structure as hav-
The rumbles of the earthquake that threatens to shatter the monolith of self send the person scurrying back and forth between the old and comfortable and the new and threatening. Separation from myself is the most profound separations. Now, at level II, some perhaps unconscious sense of the awful proportions of what is being asked may dawn on the person. Anxiety and dread of loss of comfort, of others, of above all, one's old self-induced ambivalences and ambidencies: wavering thoughts, wavering actions. At this point I can't let go of the old familiar self. It can be envisioned as annihilation or at least an amputation, but if all goes well it has the potential to be part of the continuing disintegration experience that is to come in levels III and IV.

At the beginnings of this level, I am not yet sufficiently differentiated to integrate this old self as "other"—to objectify it. It is hard to see the old familiar as "Not me." It is a kind of death experience. Self-consciousness is difficult to understand in others' expectations or, worse, in terms of my fluctuating interpretations of others' expectations. I am "a reed shaken by the wind." Relationships typically are excessively emotional, showing up in extreme jealousy or overdependence. Because of the breakdown of the rigid integration of level I, and there is no preexisting hierarchical organization at this level, there is danger of developing severe psychopathologies, such as psychoses, schizophrenia, phobias, alcoholism, and drug addiction. Behavior is disoriented or externally oriented and unstable. Although they may appear sophisticated, designs of thought are often circular. There is no real autonomy, only a lower drive to be independent. A person may fly from fad to fad with no self-evaluation. Rebellion likewise is not based on values or principles, but a blind, directionless opposition to whatever becomes the enemy because it is outside the self and irritates the self. Delinquent behavior is the best example. Level II is chaotic in the sense that there is hardly any structure, and creative in the sense that there may be, somewhere in the chaos, the beginnings of order that can be rallied at level III if the necessary dynamisms are in place.

**Level III, Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration: Evaluating the Self**

The self that passes from level II to level III is still unsure, vulnerable, and threatened, yet in its depths incipiently autonomous. A newly discovered and consciously constructed hierarchy of values begins to emerge and take control at this level. One begins to get one's priorities straight. Directions of disintegration are beginning to be set, and real progress can be made after the stagnation and vacillations of the two previous levels. Instead of domination by the external environment—"what is"—behavior begins to occur on the basis of an internally evolving sense of "what should be." With the emergence of a hierarchy of values, behavior is more guided by considerations of moral responsibility. Inner conflict, now more of a struggle to bring one's behavior up to standards, can be described as vertical. Marsh and Colangelo (1983) name Tolstoy as an example of level III.

Tolstoy's ideal of the simplification of life was a unifying philosophy of his life, but it also led him into constant bickering with himself and his family over the variance between the ideal and their daily lives. His life was fraught with conflict concerning his moral principles and ideals.... Tolstoy's dominant characteristic is disintegration, characterized by inner conflict and discontent with his life in relation to his ideals, existential anxieties and suicidal tendencies. In addition to these conflicts, Tolstoy also evidenced an emerging hierarchy of values, a deepening empathy, awareness of moral responsibility, and self-evaluation. (pp. 219, 223)

Level III is marked by reflection and self-evaluation. A typical statement would be: "There's a part of me that pulls me this way" (St. Paul's "I do not understand my own behaviour; I do not act as I mean to, but do the things I hate," Romans 7:15). Marcus Tullius Cicero's "Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor—I see the better but I do the worse.") Idealism and with it existential anxiety may emerge. Because an inner ideal is dawning, a sense of one's shortcomings in the light of "What I should be" may be very strong. This self-scrutiny may be taken for neurosis and even more serious dissociative disorders, maladjustment, and personality disorders. Some schools of psychotherapy will confirm this diagnosis and attempt to "save the patient from his illness." They will attempt a kind of psychological surgery. Here is where Dabrowski's (1972) claim that "Psychoneurosis is not an illness" emerges with an appreciation of the necessity of letting the patient have the pain; the pain is necessary for real growth. Without this appreciation, the truly positive dynamisms of level III may be written off as mere neurosis or some other psychopathology to be removed by "surgical" therapy.

The difference between spontaneous multilevel disintegration and neurosis hangs on the presence or absence of appropriate dynamisms. "Self evaluation, reflection, intense moral conflict, perception of the uniqueness of others and existential anxiety are characteristic" (Piechowski, 1975, p. 262). Outside of a positive developmental framework, such behaviors easily get classified as neurotic. Dabrowski's contention that "Psychoneurosis is not an illness" begins to be most clearly evidenced at this level, for it is the level III person who exhibits symptoms that society (psychologists included) are only too ready to label as neurotic and sick, but that Dabrowski maintains may be the instigators of higher level development.

At this third level the wavering and fluctuations of level II are replaced by the onward thrust of a growing sense of direction. Behavior is guided by an emerging autonomous, emotionally discovered hierarchy of values. The individual no longer merely reacts to "what is" in the outside world, trying to
conform to it, but there emerges a sense of "what ought to be"—a sense of what is worthwhile, what is of value. And this emergent hierarchy of values is not just an abstract hierarchy; it is also a hierarchy of aims. In other words, the values, being more than mere velleities, actually influence action, so that the rising clamor of various needs and values and purposes and goals tore him apart before now converge within the individual according to the ordering of a hierarchy of values that is consciously chosen. The moral conflicts and moral concerns that come to the fore in this period do so in a contest of inner reflectiveness, not outward blaming, of productive guilt and not merely neurotic guilt.

Part of the neurotic burden of this period comes from the heavy realization that one is responsible for oneself. This is a two-edged sword, liberating on the one side because one realizes one is (or can be) free from blind subservience to external determination, but burdening on the other side, because now the individual is faced with the choice of control within the self. Fear, dread, and anxiety may result, but not as the alternation of fears and short-lived courage (ambivalences) that marked the earlier level. Now the neurotic burdens at level III tend to express themselves in existential fears, including the fear of death, and one must work through reflectively the responsibilities of the truly healthy neurotic.

Dynamisms of development at work particularly at this level are (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977, p. 87): Astonishment—One is astonished with oneself. At one time I say, "What could I have been afraid of?" At another time I rightly conclude: "That is worth fearing." This dynamism has a distinct intellectual component. It is a reflection on the fact that some of one's mental qualities and activities catch one by surprise. Disquietude—One's behavior becomes subject to self-awareness, self-criticism, and ultimately to self-control. The egocentric component of one's anxiety is reflected on and replaced by a higher-level anxiety that may paralyze one's development by wallowing in the fear. The allocentric and altruistic anxieties that mark this period also contribute the disquietude that moves one to say, "There are people out there who need me and for whom I can do some good; I am wasting my time and shirking my responsibility by sitting here navel gazing, concentrating on my own fears." This kind of discontent with primitive behaviors in ourselves can lead to transcendence of them and movement toward higher, existential, and transcendental levels of concern.

Feelings of inferiority—Feelings of inferiority that previously were directed toward others whom we envied or judged better than ourselves now become directed toward oneself. We begin to see what we "ought" to be with our own particular configuration of talents and the opportunities that our time and place give us. We feel inferior now to what we can and should be, rather than merely inferior to others. Feelings of shame and guilt—"neurotic" guilt in this context shakes off its aimlessness and rids itself of its ability to frustrate every worthwhile action. Instead, guilt, remaining an active dynamic in the process, leads us to discover the more altruistic elements in our neurosis, for example, fear for others and the need to help others in their fears and anxieties, in their neurotic conflicts, is much stronger. Dissatisfaction with oneself leads to constant readiness to counteract the pressure of primitive tendencies. It is not the dead-end street of lower levels; it is a motivating dynamic and actively involved in goading us on to what ought to be. Positive maladjustment—adjustment and maladjustment have been overworked words in the history of psychology. Dabrowski makes some typically refreshing distinctions that throw new light on them. Dabrowski sees social adjustment as the ability to live in harmony with social norms and act successfully in one's society. However, this may amount to mere conformity to social standards that prevail at the time (1970, p. 162). This kind of conforming adjustment is usually considered by many psychologists and educators as a sign of mental health, whereas social maladjustment is for them a clear symptom of mental disturbance.

R.D. Laing, after many years of dealing with emotionally disturbed people, proposed a revolutionary concept of adjustment. Basically, his approach is to say that those symptoms that mental hospitals label as psychotic and labeled as "neurotic" or "psychotic" are often only the apt reaction of sensitive people responding appropriately to the society around them which is itself sick. The novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the movie that came from it graphically illustrate in incidents rich with humor but tinged with tragedy that happen when a person with brilliance, sensitivity, and imagination is "treated" by lesser human beings who, "well adjusted" as they may be, have become adjusted to a system that is itself sick.

Dabrowski celebrated the positive side (and the pain) of this when he greeted in poetry those rejected ones (these are not the original words, but a personal rendering inspired by Karen Nelson, 1989):

Hail to You Psychoneurotics

Hail to you, psychoneurotics! For you see sensitivity in the insensitivity of the world, uncertainty in its certainties. For you are often as conscious of others as of yourself. For you feel the anxiety of the world, its abysmal narrowness and unfounded self-assurance. For your phobia of washing the dirt from your hands, for your dread of being locked in the world's limitations; for your fear of the absurdity of existence. For your restraint in holding back what you see in others. For your awkwardness in dealing with practical things, and for your practicality in dealing with unknown things, for your transcendental realism and lack of everyday realism.
For your maladjustment to “what is” and adjustment to “what ought to be.”
For all your unrealized possibilities.
For being treated instead of curing others,
for your enabling power squashed by brutal force,
for that which is prescient, unsaid, infinite in you.
For the loneliness and strangeness of your ways,
Hail to you!

To help us understand “adjustment” and his attitude toward it, Dabrowski makes these unique distinctions.

**Adjustment**

**Negative.** Conformity to the prevailing norms, customs, and mores without any critical evaluation, or perhaps with the evaluation: “Everybody is doing it, so it must be all right.” It is not autonomous and is basically inauthentic. It is adjustment to “what is.”

**Positive.** Shaping one’s life around a considered hierarchy of values consciously developed and expressive of the individual’s personality ideal, what he or she would like to be. This is adjustment to “what ought to be.”

**Maladjustment**

**Negative.** Denial and rejection of social norms, not for the sake of higher values, but because lower-level primitive urges and pathological structures are in control. In its extremes negative maladjustment is represented by psychosis, psychopathy, and criminal activity.

**Positive.** This is partial adjustment to what is, accompanied by increasing adjustment to higher levels of development. It is expressed in conflict with and rejection of standards, patterns and attitudes in the environment that are incompatible with one’s growing awareness of and loyalty to a higher scale of values.

In summary, level III, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, is a kind of turning point level where the individual’s own forces begin to take hold and begin to direct the disintegrative process toward higher levels. We have explored in a fair bit of detail some particular dynamisms because they are the forces that are particularly operative at the third level of development (see Figure 5.2).

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**Level IV, Organized Multilevel Disintegration:**

James’ Twice-Born

Conscious forces bringing development into synthesis characterize this level. Now the hierarchical organization of goals and values integrated into an actualization hierarchy blossoms with the nourishment of consciousness and self-direction. This level is characterized by strong inner autonomy similar to that of Maslow’s self-actualizing people. These are men and women with a clear sense of universal values deliberately chosen. Their values are not merely personal likes and dislikes, but reflect their appreciation of others and their solidarity with them. A confirmed sense of responsibility leads them to take up tasks for the sake of others. These people are focused on problems outside themselves rather than on self-protection or the enhancement of their own egos. Alert to the needs of their times, they not only see but respond appropriately. Piechowski and Tyska (1982) pointed to Eleanor Roosevelt as an outstanding example of this level. The guiding principle of this level is “What ought to be will be.”

Comparisons have been made between this and Maslow’s form of personality organization, which he called self-actualization (Piechowski, 1991). Level IV seems to correspond to Maslow’s concept of the self-actualizing person, whereas level V parallels Maslow’s self-actualized person. The integration that takes place between these levels is not just something personal, but social—the image is that of one who says with full understanding: “Mankind my kind.”

There is some overlap of level III and level IV, with level IV being distinguished by a greater degree of consciousness that leads to a directed and self-determined organization of development. The individual knows much more clearly not only what he should be, but arising from this, what he will be. Tensions and conflicts are not as strong as in level III. Autonomy, authenticity, and an enhanced sense of responsibility are the predominant dynamisms of this period. The advancement of this period involves, besides responsibility, the operation of the “lodesit” dynamism—personality ideal.

The “ought to be” quality of some of the previous levels, having moved far beyond any “tyranny of the shoulds” as Karen Horney expressed in her study of the neurotic personality, becomes a “lure,” as Whitehead would say, and the strength increases at level IV of this dynamism of the personality ideal. It is an image of the ideal self that is not neurotically unrealistic, nor a mere verity that one would like to strive for “sometime but not now.” Instead, it is an active and powerful dynamism that will play an increasingly important role in the next level: secondary integration. Behavior at level IV tends toward the two different but mutually reinforcing goals of self-perfection and the service of others.

Using the example of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of The Little Prince, Dabrowski and Piechowski (1977, Vol. II) demonstrate that the characteristics of level IV correspond to the traits of the self-actualized
Evolving Spirituality • Part I

Introduction to Positive Disintegration

Harmonious unity and integration guided by personality ideal flows with universal compassion, love and service to humanity, and the realization of changeless values. Their caring is gentle and not moralistic. Dichotomies dissolve. The words of Joseph Campbell exemplify this kind of thinking:

The separateness apparent in the world is secondary. Beyond that world of opposites is an unseen, but experienced unity in us all. Today, the planet is the only proper “in group.” When you have come past the pairs of opposites you have reached compassion. (Osbon, 1991, p. 24-25)

Very few have come into this level according to Dabrowski. Christ, perhaps the Buddha, Gandhi, Schweitzer, Dag Hamarskjöld, and a tiny handful of unknown human beings who have realized this high mystical state.

We have seen in this section something of the levels, the stages that psychologists find to describe the upward motion of development. Now we go on to look at what forces drive and guide this development. Dabrowski called them “dynamisms.”

Facilitators of Development

Dynamisms: Shapers of Development

Dynamisms is another of those Dabrowskian words with a specialized meaning. Because they are not the common vocabulary of other psychologists, and because Dabrowski has given them specific and original meanings, the dynamisms deserve our careful attention.

Dynamisms are the shaping forces of development. They do this shaping both by empowering inner psychic transformation and by inhibiting lower-level inclinations and behaviors. Dynamisms are defined as “intra-psychic dispositional traits which shape development” (Piechowski, 1977, p. 37). They determine tendencies or predispositions to respond. Kawczak (1970) called dynamisms “psychological compounds which unite intellectual and intuitive insights with affective involvement and commitment” (p. 8). Some dynamisms work at several levels, but each level is characterized by its own constellation of dynamisms. The presence or absence of certain dynamisms is the empirical basis for (a) determining an individual’s current level of development, (b) ascertaining the presence of developmental potential, and (c) distinguishing positive from negative disintegration.

Figure 5.2 depicts the dynamisms and shows how they characterize each level of development. The shaded bars indicate the emergence and gradual disappearance of each dynamism. Shaded areas indicate tension in the operation of a dynamism. This tension tends to abate toward higher levels of development with the exception of personality ideal, which increases in significance and power as development advances. Note that at each level of development there is a different constellation of dynamisms. For example,
Ambivalences: Confused feelings of wanting and not wanting, inferiority and superiority, love and hate, that often lead to ambidirections, self-defeating behavior.

Environmental intrusion: The insensitivity that kept a shield between the world and oneself has cracked. The opinion of others begins to penetrate.

"What will people think?" causes one to pause, maybe even leading to feelings of inferiority toward others. Authorities (from parents and church to gossip magazines), whether worthy or not, dictate values.

Identification: Unlike sympathy, identification centers not so much on groups as on other persons. It does not at this level flow from a deep appreciation of the other person made possible by empathy. Rather, it is identification with an image, and that identification may come from superficial contacts or even from media hype. The "best" singer is the most popular. The rich and famous become heroes. Emulating the star can be as dogged as following him or her into drugs and suicide.

Creativity begins at this level and will drive development up through the higher levels as it becomes more reflective and complex itself. In the beginning it is impulsive, having little to do with personal growth. One is impressed with the endless variations of the world, but cannot discriminate and even evaluate as to relative value. There is fascination with pathology, evil, and the most "way out" experiences such as Satanism. Religion and magic merge.

Dynamisms at Level III

Dynamisms at this level are characterized by spontaneity and lack of organization. These operate in the first phase of multilevel disintegration. They are:

Positive maladjustment. "Adjustment" has become a cliché in psychology and is almost automatically accepted as a good thing. As we have seen, Dabrowski, on the other hand, makes some refreshing distinctions that open up new dimensions of understanding and challenge. The tendency to live in harmony with social norms and to act successfully in society without causing any ripples is lauded. Parents, church, and school encourage conformity, because it helps them to get on with their business, and their business most often is preserving the status quo. However, the tendency to live in harmony with social norms may amount to mere unreflected conformity. Although this kind of adjustment is looked upon usually as a sign of mental health, there are times in life when society itself is so sick that conformity amounts to wallowing in social illness. Maladjustment is the only honest answer, and the only healthy one.

Instead of the all-too-facile conclusion that adjustment is "good" and maladjustment is "bad" (which in itself is a conformist conclusion), Dabrowski invites us to make some cardinal distinctions not only between adjustment and maladjustment, but between the negative and positive aspects of each.

The positive maladjustment of higher-level persons comes at a price. This is a lonely and threatened position. (Recall what the Pharisees did to Christ for his nonconformity to their rules, what the Nazis did to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and what police in central America do today to anyone who is "different.") But this is autonomy in its fullest sense of taking into account what the social environment has to teach, parceling out what is lower and what is higher and living according to the higher principles.

This is the root to what Dabrowski calls "authenticity"—actually living according to one's hierarchy of values. It involves autonomy: freedom from the lower levels in oneself, and enough confidence in one's developmental past to move onward.

Feelings of shame and guilt. Shame is usually associated with feelings of inferiority toward others, leading to anxiety and urging one to withdraw and hide away. Guilt, on the other hand, strikes a moral tone of having failed in relationships. Guilt is the forerunner of the higher dynamism of responsibility.

Astonishment and disquietude with oneself. The surprise and shock of coming face to face with the reality of oneself and the anxiety that can arise about one's own behavior or even one's sanity can themselves be dynamisms of growth.

Feelings of inferiority toward oneself. When dissatisfaction with self is joined by the ability to initiate a hierarchy of values unite with this dynamism, one begins to appreciate the gap between where one is and where one strives to be.

Dissatisfaction with oneself. This dynamism shows itself in anger and frustration not just with the outside world, but with oneself. It is an inchoate distancing, the ability to stand back and evaluate self on the basis of a hierarchy of values.

Dynamisms Predominant at the Highest Levels

Hierarchization. Before one can have a conscious hierarchy of values, one must come to the important realization that different things have different values in themselves, and not just because I put value on them. We have here, then, not only the beginnings of valuation, but the beginnings of real value and even moral objectivity.

Personality ideal. This is the dominant dynamism of level IV and the signal dynamism of level V. It is the core of a self-aware, self-chosen, and self-affirmed personality structure. Through its centripetal force the spiral of development is drawn toward a single-mindedness that will have nothing less. Initially perceived intuitively in a broad outline, it becomes later the model for shaping one's personality, the criterion of value. It is defined in meditation, prayer, and contemplation in which the individual perceives gradually the existence of hierarchical design of personality that must go above and beyond the self. This ideal proves to be a lure to what is highest
and best. This is mysticism in its purest sense; clearly its domain is transcendent and its object nothing short of God.

Autonomy. Autonomy makes one open to others, but selectively. Autonomy is freedom from lower-level drives within the self and from the influences of the external environment. This dynamism, coming about through the aegis of personality ideal, far from cutting one off from the influences of the outside world, only makes one sharper in discriminating them; far from compacting one into a self-centered position, it draws one to address the needs of the world.

Authenticity, not to be equated with authenticity, brings awareness and expression of one's own emotional, intellectual, and volitional attitudes, involves insight into self and, moreover, an appreciation of oneself for one's unique, individual qualities. It is a profound appreciation, without pride, of one's own preciousness, one's own unrepeatability. Autonomy and authenticity see in the individual, freed from lower-level instincts and selectively independent of his or her environment, finds a centeredness, a stillpoint in the self marked by a high degree of unity in one's thinking, emotions, and activity. This is conscious activity in accordance with one's "inner truth" but not cut off from others.

Responsibility lies first and foremost toward one's own personality and its ideal. This is not egocentrism (that has been left far behind). This is care, concern, respect for others and self, realizing that it is through one's best self that care is realized. The sources of responsibility are the highest level of empathy and love for every human being, and the need to turn this love to action.

Autopsychotherapy and education of oneself. Autopsychotherapy is self-education under conditions of stress in times of crises and neuroses. Conflicts, depressions, and anxieties are handled consciously by the individual. Conscious self-healing exemplifies this process at work. Autopsychotherapy replaces therapy by others when this level is achieved.

Inner psychic transformation is observed in fundamental, deep responses, sometimes sudden and intense, that change the direction of behavior, deepen sensitivity, and bring about a conversion or metanoia. One may, in Dabrowski's words, "transcend the biological life cycle" or "transcend one's psychological type." In the first case, somatic determinants connected with age may be replaced by richer, accelerated development. In the second case, transcending one's psychological type may mean balancing the personality by introducing some traits of an opposite type, an extrovert, for example, adopting the best of introversion, a timid person becoming a leader. When this transformation reaches the point of irreversibility, even under stress, the transcendence is true. Dabrowski points to the importance of meditation in achieving these major and stable transformations.

Third Factor (Autonomous factor). Psychology has recognized the influence on personality development of the two classic factors of heredity and environment. Dabrowski invites us to consider a Third Factor. At lower levels of development much of human behavior is unmediated by deliberate choice. TPD says we need not, however, be helpless victims of heredity and environment. We have a hand in our own development, and by that (with these insights of the last decade of this century we might add) in the development of our planet and in the evolution of the human race. One sets apart evolution does) in oneself and one's environment those elements that are positive and to be cherished. One rejects inferior demands and selects the better, higher demands. Through this process we develop a consciously chosen hierarchy of values. Subject-object in oneself uncovers these values; third factor decides and selects, while inner psychic transformation puts the decision to work. One accepts responsibility not only for specific choices, but, more than that, one accepts responsibility for the course one's life takes, for the direction of one's development. This is metanoia, profound, life-directing conversion in the fullest sense of the word. Responsibility for one's actions is enhanced by responsibility for one's development.

The third factor is a dynamism of conscious choice, self-determination in the long run, by which one distinguishes in self and in environment those elements that are positive and those that are negative. This is the basis for the higher and lower ordering of elements that is the essence of forming hierarchies. That which is lower can be rejected; that which is higher can be sought. One sees, for example, that higher levels of consciousness are what make up the essence of one's humanness, rather than feeling a sense of identity that is limited to one's body.

The third factor is the dynamism of valuation. With it one becomes consciously involved in developing an autonomous hierarchy of values. The third factor judges what subject-object in oneself has uncovered.

Subject-object in oneself. This novel name discloses a fascinating and important dynamism of development. In one sweep it brings a flash of insight into understanding and overcoming a classic philosophical problem: the Cartesian dichotomy between subject and object. Paradox and enigma are here. Most of us are experts in subjectivity; we know our own experiences. Occasionally we can even manage to experience the other in their subjectivity. But there is, says Dabrowski, something much more than that. The other side of the coin (which few psychologies or philosophies explore) imagines the person at this level as able to step outside of that subjectivity that comes so easily to the most challenging and difficult task of viewing himself or herself objectively. Like someone looking in a mirror, we can glimpse the self, the subject, as an object to be examined. It may be a passing flash, gone in an instant; it may be a life-changing and enduring insight into self. The sources of this objectivity are in the higher levels of subjectivity. Lonergan (1974) puts this experience, the convergence of subjectivity and objectivity,
succinctly: “Objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity” (p. 214). We will get back to this later.

**Overexcitabilities**

Developmental potential is defined operationally as the sum of the psychiatric overexcitabilities and the developmental dynamisms present in an individual. It would help in our understanding of developmental potential to examine what Dabrowski means by “psychic overexcitabilities” and “dynamisms,” giving some examples of the different kinds he distinguishes.

*Types of overexcitability.* I still have trouble with the “over” part of the word that Dabrowski has coined. It has the inherent meaning in the English language of “too much” and that is a pejorative meaning. What Dabrowski means is “more than the ordinary”—something that the prefix super implies in a positive sense. Perhaps the word superresponsivity might carry the intended meaning better. It is more positive and also conveys the double action of perception and response, not only being responsive to stimuli impinging on the person, but strong in like response. Dabrowski’s overexcitable people are more than ordinarily sensitive to certain stimuli and, although this is commonly looked upon as a desirable quality in stereo it is often regarded as a nagging problem when we find it in the people around us. Again, perhaps this is one of the recurring paradoxes of TPD along with the notion that disintegration leads to growth; along with the notion that a crisis is an opportunity; along with the notion that psychoneurosis is not an illness comes the idea that to be “overexcitable” is not bad, but potentially productive of great humanness.

Dabrowski’s distinction of five kinds of mental functioning is based on his clinical observation of “types of overexcitability.” He observed that some children, some adolescents, and some adults consistently overreacted to both external and intrapsychic stimuli. Their overreacting expressed certain dimensions of their personality: (a) psychomotor, (b) sensual, (c) imaginative, (d) intellectual, or (e) emotional. Some individuals seemed to be more sensitive to one kind of stimulus, some to a broad range of stimuli. Some showed sensitivity at lower psychomotor levels, others at higher levels more closely connected with cortical functioning. Dabrowski was thus able to arrange them into a hierarchy rising in the order in which I have listed them above. These overexcitabilities are like two-way channels or radar receptors, bringing stimuli into the individual and sensing those stimuli that the individual produces intrapsychically. The openness of these channels and the number of them operating determine the amount of psychic stimuli the individual is receiving. More importantly, the level of the channels that are operative determines the process of dissolution of lower-level activity and organization and growth toward higher levels. Messages from the higher-level channels bring about the dissolution of lower-level responses and open up the possibility of reorganization at a higher level. Less automatic, more voluntary responses that come later in development conflict with earlier more automatic modes of functioning. Higher-level processes disorganize and inhibit more automatic ones. The disequilibrium these overexcitabilities produce brings on the emergence and organization of higher levels of control.

In brief, psychic overexcitability refers to an especially heightened reaction of some individuals when exposed to certain classes of stimuli. The experiences and responses of such individuals are above average in terms of their intensity, frequency, and duration.

It would serve us well to look at each of these types of overexcitabilities individually, beginning at what I see as the lower end of Dabrowski’s ranking.

**Psychomotor**

Psychomotor overexcitability is a result of an organic excess of energy expressing itself in the neuromuscular system. Emotional tension may come out in psychomotor forms of expression such as restlessness, drumming fingers on a table, rapid talk, or chainsmoking. This overexcitability finds release too in violent games and dances, intense athletic activities, and perhaps in a sublimated form, in a heavy foot on the gas pedal of a car.

**Sensual**

Sensual excitability, a function of heightened experiencing of sensory pleasure, shows itself as a need for comfort, fashion, and beauty in a stereotypical sense, varied sexual experiences, and numerous relationships, which may not extend to any depth. Overeating and obsession with food, sex, and physical stimulation are examples of the transfer of emotional tension into sensual forms. Sexuality at this level is appreciated merely as a sensation with little thought given to personal relationships. This is the playboy mentality, demonstrated often as voyeurism in males without emotional involvement and as a sensual exhibitionism in females.

Let the descriptions of these first two levels seem to be totally pejorative and even moralistic, I think it is good to remember that psychomotor and sensual excitabilities, although low in Dabrowski’s hierarchy, do have a legitimate place and are often expressed in the “fun” things of life from waterskiing to stroking a cat to liking a velvet painting for its texture. The important thing is that if the appreciation stops there, as with the velvet painting, and no higher intellectual and emotional sensitivities are active, these overexcitabilities remain truncated, as does the individual.

**Imaginational**

A further rung up the ladder of overexcitabilities is imagination. Imaginational overexcitability in its negative sense manifests itself in dreams, night-
Introduction to Positive Disintegration

"It made a queer funny ache and yet it was a pleasant ache. Did you ever have an ache like that, Mr. Cuthbert?"

"Well now, I just can't recollect that I ever had."

"I've had it lots of times—whenever I see anything royally beautiful. But they shouldn't call that place the Avenue. There is no meaning in a name like that. They should call it—let me see—the White Way of Delight. Isn't that a nice imaginative name?" (1968, pp. 19-20)

Perhaps Lucy Maud Montgomery betrays her own emotional and imaginative overexcitability when in Anne of the Island (1968, p. 11) she makes these comments on the adolescent Anne, locked in reverie beside a shining brook: "And she was richer in those dreams than in realities; for things seen pass away, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Intellectual

Intellectual overexcitability is shown in the avid search for knowledge, persistent question asking, the search for a theoretical framework, and the love of logic.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, to whom we have referred from time to time, drawing on the resources of his intellectual development, was even in childhood an example of intellectual overexcitability. His mother was cutting his hair one day when he was a child of four or five. To his horror he watched some of his tresses fall into the fireplace and become consumed in the flames. He saw something of himself perishing and, grasping the perishableness of his world, he began to search for things with permanence. First he found pieces of iron, and clung to his collection of iron objects to reassure himself that some things do endure. Then one day he noticed streaks of rust on a farm plow and came to the conclusion that even iron was slowly perishing. His quest for the enduring sent him off in search of rocks in the hills of his native Auvergne countryside. Fortunately for him (and ultimately for us), the rocks around his home were a rich source of quartz and amethyst. He started a collection that was the beginning of a lifelong interest in paleontology. Freud might have had other interpretations of this childish passage in the life of a young boy, but such interpretations fade into foolishness. I see the dynamics in action here as those of a budding intellectual overexcitability, for they combine the intelligence, curiosity, and intensity of emotional grasp that comprise intellectual overexcitability.

To combine the concepts intellectual and excitability seems at first look impossible if we are to maintain the classical distinction between cognitive and affective, between intellect and emotion. How can we have an "excited intellect"? R.S. Peters (1974), shows the congruence of this idea when, in reacting to Hume's (1978) equating reason with the sort of reason that goes on in logic and mathematics or in science, illustrating a broader view of "reason." Peters points out that there is a cluster of "passions" closely
connected with reason without which its operations would be unintelligible. He is referring to “the passion for truth,” “abhorrence of the arbitrary,” “hatred of inconsistency and irrelevance,” “love of clarity and order,” and “the determination to look at facts” (p. 329). Both Dabrowski and Peter remind us that, though we have separated them for convenience of understanding, intellect and emotion are inseparable companions in real life. To speak of “intellectual overexcitability” is not only possible, but an exciting idea in itself! Pearce (1992, pp. 42ff), explores the threefold human brain: the “Mind of three minds, thought, feeling and action” in his book *Evolution’s End*. Mere intellect found in the cortex of the highest brain is not enough. All three work together in the richest of situations, uniting especially when feeling with intellect and action to yield something more than mere intellectual or full intelligence. Bruno Bettelheim (1960) called it “the informed heart.”

**Emotional**

Emotional overexcitability is a heightened mode of experiencing and responding to emotional relationships. The relationships can be with persons, objects, living things, or even places (remember Anne and her intense relationship with the “White Way of Delight”). From the point of view of Positive Disintegration theory, mere intensity of emotions or great displays of emotions are not enough. There must be a relationship. Piechowski gives an example: When a child is refused a candy, he may throw a temper tantrum to show his anger. Or he may go away sad, thinking he is not loved. In the first place we have only a display of emotion and perhaps an object relationship; in the second, a human relationship (1977, pp. 34-35).

Emotional overexcitability may show itself either in direct, positive expression such as enthusiasm or in inhibition such as timidity and shyness. Emotions may center around fears, anxieties, loneliness, depression, feelings of insecurity, or concern with death. They may delve into the past in the form of affective memory (“They’re playing our song”). Feelings that are connected with interpersonal relationships if they are intense may express themselves in a widespread concern for others (Mother Teresa of Calcutta), or in deep exclusive relationships with only a few or only one person. For some, one of the most profound of emotional relationships will be with God, who for them is a very real person.

Children display emotional overexcitability when an infant looks perplexed and worried at the sound of another child crying, when the child cries at the sight of a dead animal, when he or she shows compassion for an injured friend, when he or she is moved to be generous and acts accordingly without looking for a reward.

My own son Daniel at the age of three surprised us with his response to a scene in a movie, in which an exasperated father poured milk over the head of one of his children while his brothers and sisters laughed uproariously. Daniel, in a serious mood and stern language, said, “That is not funny—I would get a cloth and wipe the boy’s face.” Injustice toward a child from an adult was too much for him to accept.

It should be noted in conclusion that each type of overexcitability does not usually exist in isolation from the others; usually there is a dominant form accompanied by others in varying degrees. Overexcitabilities may be absent altogether or present only at the psychomotor or sensual level, but this is the case only when development is limited to primary integration.

The hierarchical ordering in which I have placed the overexcitabilities is significant for the process of development. The two lowest forms—psychomotor and sensual—characterized by restlessness and an extroverted pleasure-seeking, cannot engage psychic processes, nor are they by themselves productive of the reflective attitude and enriching human relationships. Dabrowski sees as essential for positive disintegration.

But the story is quite different with the three overexcitabilities at higher levels: imaginative, intellectual, and emotional. They enrich personal development, giving insight into the many levels and dimensions of the world and our relationships with it. They enhance introspection, introspection, and prospection. With these important channels open and sensitive, there is possible a deeper appreciation of the past, a more vivid appreciation of what is going on within and without a person, and a glimpse (more than passing), of what might be.

**Summary**

Dabrowski’s conception of development stands in sharp contrast to those theories that are based on the principle that humans are motivated by a desire for homeostasis or equilibrium, that the optimum state of well-being is to exist in some sort of quiescent, conflict-free situation where one can be at rest. Instead, it says that life, both from outside the psyche and from intrapsychic dynamics, forces conflicts on individuals that can be disintegrative of lower-level functioning and offer the opportunity of rising to higher levels of development. We have seen that the theory of Positive Disintegration eminently expresses the developmental theme of movement away from egocentrism toward empathy and caring. It also shows a movement through development from external control toward autonomy and authenticity and inner directedness. It demonstrates a movement away from tyrannical forces of control, from subjection to whim and caprice, toward greater personal choice, directed it is true by what is learned from outside oneself, but guided ultimately by a contemplative, reflective approach toward a personality ideal. Moral differentiation of others is based on the deepest empathy, which is the fruit of insights gained in contemplation.

Intense inner conflict, dissatisfaction with oneself, disintegration of what we are, to make room for what we might be—the themes of Positive Disintegration, which builds on the idea that lower-level functions have to disintegrate when challenged by higher-level functions, then disap-
pear to make room for the higher. This is the process of growth, the dynamic of movement from lower to higher, that has been propounded by psychologists as the driving force behind development.

Our lives have both passive and active phases. The suffering that Dabrowski envisages is not mere passive acceptance of an unhappy lot in life; it is the active grasping of opportunity to really participate in life. TPD says we humans can in a special way respond to this call to be participants in life. Acceptance of suffering may be passive; it may on the other hand (and this is what TPD deep down is saying) be a bold "yes," not just to this particular act of disintegration, but to the greater soulful pains of all creation continually giving birth. Ultimately it is a "yes" to the God of creation, still in the toil of bringing pattern and ultimately beauty out of chaos. We can choose to side with God as co-workers, co-creators, accepting the challenge to join forces on the side of life. When we take this wider stance we must admit that humans are not consistently Godlike: on the side of life. But, though we may see ourselves as part of a universe that is itself sometimes brutal, and belonging to that portion perhaps most brutal of all, we also recognize that while we live we are gifted with choice. We are responsible agents. We can change things, not just immediate things, but if we reflect on it nothing less than the course of creation. Our principal task is not merely shaping self, nor even influencing society, but nothing less than the building of the universe. This calls for daring choices of a justice tempered by compassion. Virtues like care, responsibility, and the ability to identify with others are signposts throughout TPD as goals and measures of higher-level development. Overall, the movement is from egocentrism to a balanced allocentrism that, though caring for others, does not neglect fidelity to oneself.

In the next chapter we will pick out of this broad theory of Positive Disintegration those components that have special relevance to religion and morality. Related readings not already cited in this chapter are: Dabrowski (1964, 1966), Borofski (1981), and Hague (1976, 1988a, 1990a, 1990b, 1993b, 1993c, 1994).

Chapter 6
Positive Disintegration and Religious Development

Positive Disintegration is a general theory of development and, as such, could not be considered a specialized theory of religious development.

However, its themes are those of religious development, and the insights it offers are creative, profound, and unique, offering a synthesis that no other theory seems to have either the depth or the breadth to encompass. The source of this can be traced directly to its founder, Kazimierz Dabrowski, who was himself deeply religious with a great respect for God and for his neighbor.

The best way to begin our discussions of the implications of Positive Disintegration for religious development is to approach the topic as Dabrowski himself would, looking at religion as a multilevel concept. Dabrowski did this in two ways in the first volume of his Theory of Levels of Emotional Development (1977) considering the religious attitude first as an emotional-cognitive function (pp. 142-144), and then going on to consider the levels of religion looked at as a discipline (pp. 215-217). These two major expositions of religion as a multilevel phenomenon are worthy of full repetition here.

The Religious Attitude

Level I. The primitive anthropomorphic conception of forces of "good" and "evil" is based partly on a magical approach and partly on unreflective tendencies of approach and avoidance. One appeals to higher forces primarily to obtain support and protection in the realization of primitive endeavors and satisfaction of biological needs. Success in such undertakings brings about a sense of power and a magic attitude toward oneself such as conviction of possessing superhuman heroic attributes or even of being a demigod. Such attitudes are easily produced by self-suggestion, that one is in favor with the gods because one or another of one's undertakings has succeeded. Such a religious attitude is characteristic of primitive tribes and psychopathic individuals who believe themselves to possess superhuman powers. Outstanding examples are Nero, Ivan the Terrible, Pope Alexander VI, Hitler, Stalin, and Charles Manson.

Level II. Ambivalences and ambiterrendencies manifested as belief and disbelief, as "spiritualization" of one's approach to a divinity, as periods of
fear or disregard of a divinity. Symbolization of personal fears and inner conflicting impulses in the guise of different gods is characteristic here as personification of human opposites. Or there may be a feeling of an excessive contact with the divinity symbolized by a ritual of betrothal to a divine personage, often followed by a feeling of letdown or a lack of favor (grace). Also characteristic at this level are periodic attitudes of atheism alternating with search for contact with a deity and its protective power.

Level III. Under the influence of multilevel dynamisms develops a hierarchy of religious values. This is followed by a need to spiritualize and differentiate the concept of divinity. The image and a conception of a divinity grow out of one’s developmental tendencies and strivings. The concreteness of immanence is linked with the concreteness of transcendence. In religious immanence, one creates an idea of God through one’s subjective needs; in transcendence, one sees God independently of one’s subjectivity. Concrete transcendental realities correspond with strong emotional realities of a high level of development. Immanence and transcendence may appear as an antinomy, yet at the same time they constitute a two-part harmony. In the search for grace, it is experienced as coming from two directions at once: from the subject and from higher reality. Sometimes one observes deviant, more unilinear, forms of devotion to the deity characterized by artificiality, excessive self-criticism and self-abasement, or spiritual narcissism.

Level IV. With the development of a high level of allocentrism, one observes gradual development of existential attitudes, of delving into the essence of valuing divinity as an embodiment of love, together with a deepening need of faith in the uniqueness of God and his personal attributes. As a result of experiences gained through systematic meditation, contemplation, and the effort at self-perfection, a tendency develops toward making one’s subjective religious needs more objective and toward making transcendence a concrete reality. Religious attitude is manifested as a search in transcendence for objective supernatural realms.

Level V. Development of the relationship “I” and “Thou” in the sense of development of absolute religious values of faith, together with all-embracing empathy and universal love. The search for a transcendental hierarchy in the religious attitude finds expression in authentism and in idealization of personality. Such an attitude develops through an intuitive synthesis of one’s personal relationship with the divinity. In this level, religious attitude is marked by clarity and simplicity that is nourished by the great depth of religious experience. It is also characterized by an effort to make the relation between immanence and transcendence understandable, to make God a concrete experience, to carry on with Him a dialogue in place of one’s monologue. Breaks and interruptions may occur in such a dialogue, leading to the “dark night of the soul,” but the need and the search for the

Religion

Level I is characterized by primitive naturalism, frequently as a function of self-preservation; fear and “humbleness” before “higher forces,” expectation of punishment; primitive symbolization of gods; praising the gods and bribing them with gifts and offerings; brutality and cruelty in making live sacrifices; and instances of deification of oneself.

Level II is characterized by the beginnings of experiencing and adopting an immanent attitude; some degree of respect for divinity; fluctuation of feelings toward gods or toward one god, manifestly in fluctuation of atheistic and personalistic attitudes; variable attitudes of fear, self-abasement, and subordination alternating with periods of self-confidence; emotional attitude toward a god of good and a god of evil is not elaborated and is, therefore, inconsistent and unstable. The conceptions of immanence and transcendence are vague because a superficial external attitude toward a god prevails, hence attraction toward religious ceremony and ritual.

Level III. The attitude of respect toward the divine is distinct. There is a gradual hierarchization of values and of divinity; prevalence of monotheism; development of religion based on respect and conscious, freely accepted dependence; immanence combined with a tendency to see transcendence as a concrete possibility; development of inner religion with diminishing needs of external expression, more of inner worship and less of external worship.

Humility that grows out of a sense of personal relationship with God increases, while authoritarian attitudes grow weaker. Religious attitudes and feelings undergo distinct differentiation into many levels due to dissatisfaction with oneself, feelings of inferiority toward oneself, and feelings of shame and guilt. Sincerity develops. Religious attitude based on “what ought to be” rather than on “what is,” that is, a growing need to be consistent in one’s religious beliefs and one’s actions. Objection to a formal and abstract conception of God grows stronger because one’s religious attitude becomes experiential, mystical, and also empirical. God is perceived less as a God of power and more as a God of love and justice.

Level IV. Here there is organization of an autonomous hierarchy of religious values; projection of religious ideals and the personality ideal onto other functions and values; the appearance and development of the “instinct of partial death,” that is, the aim in striving for self-perfection to destroy all that is undesirable, negative, and an obstacle in development. This can be accomplished through deliberate frustration of one’s basic needs. There is a turning away from excessive institutionalism and dogmatism of religious organizations. Distinct action of developmental dynamisms causes separation of higher from the lower religious levels. There is a strong need to feel
and realize love in relationship with others; and consistency between religious convictions and one's actions. The balance between an intellectual and an emotional attitude toward God grows stronger because, at this level, emotional and intellectual functions begin to operate in unity and harmony. Concrete transcendentalism also increases as does the distinct need for dialogue with God.

Level V. Here there is a fully developed attitude of love stemming from the highest values, which personify divinity and people in their unrepresentation and individual relationships. Active love results from experiences gained in meditation and contemplation. There is total readiness for sacrifice for the sake of others and for one's faith. Union with God is experienced in meditation or in strong intuitive projections, leading to an inner understanding of God, the so-called infused knowledge. The deepest respect and love of God do not obliterate the awareness of one's individuality. This means that the sense of affinity and union with God exist together with preservation of distinct and permanent individual essence. At times, it becomes difficult to obtain a response from God, one's relationship to Him is built through continuing work of inner perfection and through creating and discovering ever higher values (pp. 215-217).

Religion at its Best, the Best of Human Development

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, priest, paleontologist, philosopher, theologian and mystic, saw in his vast perspective on the evolution of the universe, coming together of all things as they emerge from lower to higher. He enunciated this in a principle that loosely expressed says, "All that rises must converge." Teilhard de Chardin (1969a, 1969b, 1973) saw in the rising of the universe from inanimate to animate, from lower forms of life to higher, coming together of a new integrity, wholeness, and organicity. In doing this, he acknowledged two things: that reality is multilevel, with a rising from lower to higher levels; and that at its highest levels, something not found at lower levels, which are marked by disparity and confusion, creation finds remarkable unanimity, a sharing, a oneness. It is like the voices of a great choral group who have practiced painfully and separately over long weeks when they come together they discover the miracle that "it all fits" to form one work of art. No one is lost, no one diminished, no one the less because they have become part of the whole; each individual makes his or her contribution; each has value, and the miracle is that "it all fits." It all makes something more than each individual; it all makes something that transcends all individuals. Together they have individually risen to new heights, and in that rising they have converged, and in that converging they have transcended. The whole is something greater than the sum of its parts.

Dabrowski shared and enhanced de Chardin's multilevel image of the universe, and just as these two great men ascended that multilevel staircase of understanding what it is to be human, so too they converged in their thoughts. And it is here that I see the best doorway to understanding the mystery of Positive Disintegration as a theory of religious development.

Dabrowski recognized in his own lifetime the remarkable similarity of values, and goals that the eminent men and women of history had discovered for themselves and taught others. Eminent persons like Christ, Buddha, Albert Schweitzer, Jean Vanier, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta share ideas and principles not by chance, but because by the rising process of their own personality development, by their high levels of emotional development and sensitivity, they have converged together with one voice, or rather with one song that sings of what is best in being human. And that is where I would like to enter into this thing we call religion—with the idea of "what is best in being human." Paradoxically, it transcends what we typically regard as "merely human" and touches the divine. (By now we are used to finding paradoxes whenever we get to a really important idea.) For it is in religion that the human and the divine touch, like God's strong hand reaching out to save life to Adam's limp hand in the creation scene on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

So at this important point I would like to come back to one of the principal themes of this book: that religion at its best is the best of humaneness; that the best humans are truly religious, and it is, therefore, with the highest-level human beings that we will get the clearest, sharpest focus on the picture of religion. And this is fitting, for we have said that religion is best found at the highest levels of human consciousness. Dabrowski's eminent human beings are religious in the sense that their consciousness is profound, their peace is deep and lasting, their perspective on life is vast, and their relationships with the universe, with their fellow man, and with God are real and deeply personal. This is to say that those who have reached the highest of Dabrowski's levels are religious, thoughtful, reflective, prayerful, mystical. I think this is what he is saying, and the examples he uses, like Dag Hammarskjöld, even though they are not always canonized saints and holy men, have all these qualities that make religion an integral part of their being. All that rises must converge.

Positive Disintegration best tells us what is religion when it tells us what is the best religion. We saw in the initial chapters of this book numerous attempts at defining religion that began from the low end of religiosity as neurotic needs, conformity needs, need of reassurance, alleviation of guilt, and so on. We saw that it is true that much of what passes for religion is just that, satisfaction of low-level needs—humans at their dependent or exploitative worst. Regrettably, that is the content of much of the emotional baggage we bring with us when we approach the topic of religion. But what a distorted, negative approach! Dabrowski gives us a new way of understanding the great religious people who exemplify all that is best about religion and who show us something of the process of developing to those religious heights.
By reminding us that religion at its best deals with mystery and, like other things, is a many-leveled reality, and especially by describing from a psychological viewpoint what religion is at its highest levels, Dabrowski has set the goals for religious development and thereby some norms for religious education. The kind of person he describes at the upper levels of development bears a remarkable similarity to the higher reaches of human nature described by Maslow and Jung and is very unlike the "religious" person described by Freud. Again there is a remarkable consensus between Dabrowski's higher level individuals and the twice-born described by James. In contrast to the once-born or "healthy-minded" individuals who bear more resemblance to people at Dabrowski's lower levels, the sick soul is searching, agonizing, hungering after truth and justice, dying and being born again in a process of positive disintegration. "The religious attitude is manifested in a search in transcendence for objective supernatural realms" (Dabrowski 1977, p. 143) at Dabrowski's fourth level of development. There is a great difference between Dabrowski's theory a fifth and higher level of development, the second integration, and in describing this Dabrowski goes beyond James's sick soul and even his twice-born and paints a more realistic picture of the higher levels of religious development. It is a picture more in keeping with the traditional concept of the religious mystic who has found peace and integration with other persons, especially with God as a person, and there "rests" in a union with divinity that is special and ultimately ineffable. The search for this level is "calm though intense" (p. 144).

Jung, as we have said, and not Freud most closely coincides with Dabrowski, for Jungian psychology is basically mystical, and the religious experience is consummatory, probing the depths of what it is to be human and drawing one up to the heights of what humanness can be transcendent. For Jung the developmental process is a process toward individuation, a stage beyond mere health when new meaning is sought and one strives to live up to one's potentialities. We see here a similarity with Dabrowski's probing, searching levels, as the individual moves from what is to what ought to be and is guided by the personality ideal as the ultimate expression of one's unique possibilities.

The context of religion has broadened in recent years. We have seen, for example, how Frankl singled out purpose in life as the special need of our time, creating a spiritual setting for a response to the cry for meaning.

It is remarkable that today the search for meaning is not being pursued solely by theologians and ministers of religion but by scientists who belong to a profession long considered to shun religion in favor of materialism. It is as though, by pushing their research to the outer limits of the material world, they have glimpsed the existence of the spiritual. Einstein did not hesitate to speak of God. In a remarkable and beautiful book (1992), Belonging to the Universe: Explorations on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality, the scientist Fritjof Capra joins with David Stendler-Rast, a theologian, to dialogue just argue) about the spiritual dimensions each has found in their studies and reflection. Barlow (1994) entitles her anthology Evolution Extended: Biological Debates on the Meaning of Life. A few years ago many would have scoffed at the suggestion that biology has anything to say about life meaning, but Barlow in this landmark volume weaves the words of Julian Huxley, George Gaylord Simpson, Charles Darwin, Gregory Bateson, Karl Popper, Jacques Monod, Theodosius Dobzhansky, and others into a scholarly and reflective tour de force.

On the cutting edge of scientific research are those who study chaos theory (compare Birch, 1991; Briggs & Peat, 1990; Gleick, 1988; Pickover, 1991; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). "Chaos" has long been the descriptor for control and uncontrolled disorder, but scientists using advanced computer technology have searched into the depths of chaos and found there not only order and pattern, but beauty. There seems to be some order hidden deep in the chaos. Where we looked before for meaning we sometimes found only chance; where we looked for life we found death; where we looked for growth we found disintegration. Chaos theory has given us some scientific hope that though the world may not be just as we would like it to be, there is a grander plan, a moving on toward integration, a great process of integration no less real because we have failed to see it.

The theory Dabrowski called Positive Disintegration comes at this question, this mystery, as we saw in the last chapter, from the vantage of psychology. It tells us something of the order that can come from chaos, the meaning, purpose, and spirituality that may emerge from and through disintegration.

The Paradox of Religion: Communal and Solitary

don't know how much Dabrowski was directly influenced by the philosophy of Whitehead, but it is in Dabrowski and Whitehead that I see the most excellent convergence in their rising together. As we have seen in our introduction to the nature of religion, there are two classical points from which to view religion, one can see it from the aspect of the communal—that religion is a social organization; or one can see it from the aspect of the individual. In his introduction to a revised edition of Religions, Values and Peak Experiences (1977), Maslow acknowledges his tendency in the previous edition to downplay the communal aspects of religion in favor of seeing it as an individual experience. Whitehead has been accused of the same overemphasis by those who have latched onto his definition of religion as "what the individual does with his own solitariness," interpreting it out of context. Whitehead's real view is a balanced one. He maintains individuals are constituted by their experience of one another. Whitehead sees solitariness as especially important for certain aspects of religion:

The great religious conceptions that haunt the imaginations of civilized mankind are scenes of solitariness. Prometheus chained to his
rock, Mahomet brooding in the desert, the meditations of the Buddha, the solitary Man on the Cross. It belongs to the depth of religious spirit to have felt forsaken even by God. (1973, p. 19)

Here Whitehead is emphasizing the aloneness one feels when faced with ultimates, an aloneness that Tennessee Williams expressed so beautifully when he said, “We are all prisoners inside our own skin,” an aloneness that Christ felt in those hours of profound hesitation in Gethsemane and that he expressed on the cross in the ultimate religious experience of death for others, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Although this motif of solitude picks up the theme of James’s soul, Kohlberg’s seventh stage, or Dabrowski’s level IV, it does not without its context represent the full view of either Whitehead or Dabrowski. For Whitehead a person is always an individual in community, a self emerging through relationships. Bernard Lonergan too (1973) asserts this theme, emphasizing that the love that is involved in religious experience breaks through the isolation of the individual, causing him or her to act not just for the self, but for others (p. 289). This thrust of developmental movement away from egocentrism to allocentrism is, as we have seen, one of the mainstreams of Positive Disintegration. It helps to make a theory that at first blush is just another secular psychological theory, at its heart essentially a beacon of spiritual, even a mystical, ascent (Nixon, 1990). Whitehead’s philosophy and theology remind us that this relatedness moves beyond the human community to the structure of all the relationships of the individual to the cosmos (1938, p. 164). In this religious context the solitariness of the community to be of a person is also the condition of that person’s freedom and responsibility—-the Third Factor in Dabrowski’s terms. The following quote from Whitehead’s Religion in the Making (1973) might just as well have appeared in one of Dabrowski’s works:

The moment of religious consciousness starts from self-valuation, but it broadens into the concept of the world as a realm of adjusted values, mutually intensifying or mutually destructive. (pp. 58-59)

Whitehead and Dabrowski converge too with their emphasis on consciousness. For both the process is one of evolving to higher levels of consciousness so that one may be more participant in the unfolding of oneself and in the building of the universe. The higher the level of consciousness, the more one can choose and fully assent to the values one holds.

With the emphasis on consciousness in both Whitehead and Dabrowski, a larger picture of the process of the universe emerges, especially in Whitehead’s writings. Here is an area where the theory of Positive Disintegration can be enriched by putting it in a cosmic context that makes more explicit the grand vision that Dabrowski held. We will see later (in the morality half of this book) how a cosmic perspective and respect for the web of intercon

As we have seen, Whitehead envisioned levels of consciousness as running through all of the cosmos and not just humanity. We know that atomic particles are “conscious” of each other in the view of some physicists. And it would seem that a stone in some sense is “conscious” of its environs and thereby participant in the process of the universe, even if it is the long process of the Rocky Mountains being slowly eroded and washed down to the sea. But consciousness at the human level has the special quality of choice and freedom to participate in the process, choice of the degree to which one will participate, the level at which one participates, and consequently the amount of value one adds to the enduring nature of God. This is ultimate religion.

We have in this discussion emphasized the high end of religious development, looking at the highest levels of human development because that seemed the best doorway to understanding what religion is all about. This does not mean that the theory of Positive Disintegration neglects the ordinary man or woman who has no real possibilities of reaching the lofty mystical levels of religion. In fact it is one of the beauties of Dabrowski’s theory that it takes such pains and goes to such lengths to describe the lower levels of development and the lower levels of structures and functions, religion included. By giving a detailed description of the many levels of religion and the religious attitude, Dabrowski has thoroughly elaborated those aspects of religion that are most real to most people. It is regrettable that, for many, religion is a rationalization for power or an excuse to persecute one’s neighbor; it is regrettable that, for many, religion stops at the level of an organization because it promises to overcome loneliness by demanding blind conformity, or that by presenting a set of dogmas or moral rules given by others promises to take away the “threat” of having to choose for oneself. It is regrettable that sometimes this is the reality of religion. But it is a reality that Positive Disintegration presents bluntly and honestly by reminding us that spirituality and religion are not spared from being multileveled. There is a vast variety of ways of being religious; some of them are better than others.

On the positive side, TPD is a challenge to individuals to rise to higher levels of religious development themselves; it is a guideline to religious educators of the kind of religious people they want to produce and themselves become.

Conclusion

This first section on the psychology of religious development has been long and complex; without adding to its length, perhaps we can sort out some of the threads that run through the knots of its complexity.

You were asked in the beginning to examine the psychological baggage you brought to the whole idea of what religion is. You were asked to suspend any definition and encouraged instead to glance from many perspectives at
Chapter 7
What is Morality?

When you prevent me from doing anything I want to do, that is persecution, but when I prevent you from doing anything you want to do, that is law, order and morals.

—George Bernard Shaw

The aim of education is the knowledge not of facts, but of values.

—William Inge

In the first half of this book I have outlined something of what we mean by developmental psychology in general and then gone on to look at one narrower field we call religious development, considering it still from a psychological perspective, but with the help of philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists. It is now our task to look at what we know of morality from the viewpoint of developmental psychology. Again, we are emphasizing the developmental aspects of moral judgment, although, as we shall see, there are other psychological approaches to the study of morals.

Moralizing versus Moral Philosophizing

First, though, a note about two major ways of approaching this whole topic of morals. Politics, religion, sports, and sex are popular topics for heated discussions. Almost anyone will argue some point of view. Almost anyone, alas his or her own opinions, often quite heavily loaded with emotion. The same is true of morals. Mention the fact that you are interested in moral development and someone will have a “case” to discuss whether it be to weigh ponderously the pros and cons of nuclear war, or just to clutch their tongues over the latest scandal. Mention of the word morality almost automatically leads to the discussion of specific, concrete actions and a debate about whether these actions are “good” or “bad.” Mention that you are interested in moral education and people will nod affirmatively and say, “That’s good; I hope you can get those young people straightened out.” Try to teach a class in moral development and you will find that you must constantly fight the powerful attraction of a class discussion on specifics of “explosive” moral issues ranging from the nuclear bomb to women’s necklines. That’s why the distinction is important at the very beginning. It is the distinction between