Authentic Morality:
The Route to High Moral Ground

William J. Hague

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Abstract: Developmental psychology concentrates on movement toward higher levels which, at least implicitly, equates with "better." Better is a value statement, even a moral value statement when it moves into questions of ought and should. It is a call to higher values and subsequently higher morals. It also opens the way to objective morality through authentic subjectivity. This theme is traced through Heidegger, Lonergan, and Taylor, leading to a presentation of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration as an appropriate theory of authentic moral development.

The Developmental Context

Maps are fascinating. They bring broad, vast spaces down to something you can hold in your hand or spread out on a table and dream over. Topographical maps are especially mesmerizing, for there you get the third dimension—dark blue depths of oceans and white mountain snowcaps. Large scale maps have highways curving through the mountain valleys, but, best of all, they show faint dotted lines that wander away from the busy highway up the mountains. They hint of dark green shadowy forest trails and, at trail’s end, a rocky crag with vistas of still more peaks to climb.

Developmental psychology (when you stop to think about it) is a kind of map-making; it is topographical. Developmental psychology is famous for its stages. It talks about levels of development and outlines the routes one might take in passing through them. The very idea of stages or levels implies a terrane or mountain metaphor. It tells us that the life terrain is usually not flat and smooth except for those who choose to stay in one place. To develop, to move ahead, is to move upward. This puts the developmental psychologist into the role of mountain guide. The psychologist is like a scout who explores the terrain ahead, evaluates it, and picks out the best routes. The patent task is to lead onward, for that is what development is all about. But the hidden agenda which others accept (sometimes without reflection) is to move upward toward what is higher and better.

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"Higher" and "better" are presumed to be synonymous. But there's sometimes a problem in the presumption. When we accept the guide's invitation to go higher, we may only presume it is better without examining the guide's criteria of betterness. Better is a value statement; it leads us into a radically different category. It puts a valence, a value weighting, on a statement of fact. In psychology we frequently run into problems of better—problems of values—what really is better? Developmental psychology, because it evaluates, is a moral enterprise, pointing out certain values as the desirable objectives of one's life quest. But psychology as a scientific discipline is not always expert in what truly is better. Behind each developmental theory there is always a system of values, sometimes only implicit and often not reflected upon. The higher is frequently only presumed to be better. The guides are often hazy about goals. Those who do specify objectives frequently have little more to offer than simply "self-discovery," "pulling your own strings," "self-satisfaction," "achievement," or the ever- elusive "happiness." Many practitioners have not reflected on what makes these goals truly worthy. They are mountain guides who literally don't know which way is up! Thus, a major need of psychology today is to be clear about the values that guide.

But the tarnish on the coin of psychology is on only one side. On the obverse is the great potential of developmental psychology to give hope. The very paradigm of development, by its nature, holds a promise. By emphasizing process, it reminds us that change has happened in our past and suggests possibilities of change for the better in our future. If the promise is not to be the groundless illusion of an optimism based on the simplistic philosophy that "more is better," objectives must be defined and values must be clarified. Better cannot be merely a vague promise or an entity camouflaged in scientific, quantitative terms of "more."

So if we are into values from the start, we had better get them clear, if these values are moral, we must know what we intend. It is essential to be conscious of the implications of higher so we can own (if we still wish to) the values and the course of moral action that ensues.

From "Is" to "Ought"

Mortality is usually expressed (like the ten commandments) in terms of "should" or "ought." A certain obligation to behave in a particular way is imposed by such ought statements. Philosophers have speculated for centuries on the source of this moral obligation. They have labeled it the "is-ought" problem. Philosophers have long argued about how we get from the "isness" of things (their essence and their existence) to the obligations that go with them. How, for example, does owning a gun impose obligations on me to behave responsibly with it? Morality involves a shift from thinking about how merely is to conceiving how things ought to be. Morality arises somewhere in that hinterland between is and ought and begins when we cross from is to ought. But we are not necessarily in the moral realm just because we use the word ought. It is not a border crossing, "a line drawn in the sand," one step taking you over a sharp demarcation. Ought is a gray, graduated zone. Consider the following: "I ought to put a little more cereulene blue in my painting. I ought to wash my car. I ought to take my elbows off the table. I ought to take a shower. I ought to stop smoking. I ought to stop my drunken driving." The word ought appears in each statement, but the obligation comes from various sources—aesthetics, custom, manners, concern for others, and my own life. The examples range from something which is clearly not moral (choice of color) to something eminently moral (the preservation of life).

At this point I am going to cheat a bit. I am going to steal the philosophers' phrase and put it in a developmental context. As a psychologist, I would like to look at the is-ought question not so much as an abstract conundrum but as a practical challenge to trace the course of how a human being in the process of development makes a personal transition from is to ought—from merely seeing things as they are to conceiving how things ought to be and, beyond that, to making things (self included) what they ought to be. That is the course of full moral development.

The task is to look at moral development not simply as acquiring more cognitive and social skills but as development of character beyond mere self-preservation toward the "highest" levels. We will see that this requires, most basically, (1) an appreciation of the possibility of things being different, followed by (2) the creative ability to imagine them different. With the possibility of change established, one can move on to (3) the desirability and necessity (oughtness) of change in the vision of things as they should be. This is the basic moral vision which most of us share. But there is an essential step beyond, which the Polish psychiatrist and theorist Kazimierz Dabrowski has emphasized. Some have not only this hypothetical sense of moral oughtness but are driven to realize it consistently in their own lives and, as much as they can, in the realities of life around them. Things then, in this vision of the highest orders of human development, actually are what they ought to be: (4) ideals achieved. Steps 3 and 4 involve a double ought: (3) the grasping of an ontological oughtness (Things ought to be different) and (4) the psychological grasping and acceptance of a personal obligation to make them so (I ought to make myself and my world better). Table 1 is a schematic outline of this movement from mere realism to ideals achieved.

Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Movement from &quot;Is&quot; to &quot;Ought&quot;</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lives lived by:</td>
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<td>1. What is</td>
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<td>2. What can I be—</td>
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<td>the promise of possibilities</td>
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<td>3. What ought to be—</td>
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<td>To have a perspective</td>
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<td>4. What should be actually—is</td>
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<td>To be a perspective</td>
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Before going on, it might be helpful to indicate that this schema (though original) parallels Dabrowski's levels in the Theory of Positive Disintegration and to note what I mean by "horizon of significance," which comes from a different and perhaps not well-known source. Horizon of significance is a philosophical term with foundations in existentialism. It is borrowed from Charles Taylor (1989, 1991). My understanding of it comes from my experience, and it is this:

Born on the prairies of western Canada, I am familiar with the broad, expansive but encompassing horizon, covered by a great blue dome of sky that arches up from all around. The land itself beneath the dome is usually quite flat and frequently featureless. If something does stand out on the horizon like a tree, a grain elevator, or a distant mountain, it is significant; that is, it has salience, particularly in signifying direction and guiding one's travel. The horizon of significance is subjective: its location and significant features depend on where you stand and what you are looking for. It travels with you so that moving on will introduce new features some of which may be significant. Our life journey is guided by those features on our personal and collective horizons which are significant to us and also carry with them significance in themselves. They are not a mere clutter of insignificant information such as our world is full of; they are signals of importance, of worthwhileness, of value, and, consequently, signals of the route to self-transcendence. In such vastness one's self stands out, initially as central to it all, then as being part of it all, and ultimately to being one with it all. The whole prospect is a matter of perspective and, in that sense, may be called religious. One finds oneself and transcends oneself within a horizon of significance. The remainder of this article will elaborate on this, and, it is hoped, describe in more detail the map to moral objectivity that is only outlined above.

Moral Objectivity

Poor old Descartes has had a lot of our problems laid at his door—and rightly so. The Cartesian penchant for dichotomies has put us in a black and white world seemingly filled with opposites like mind-body, soul-body, spirit-flesh, religious-humanism. It is sometimes difficult to see shades of gray. Among them, the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy is particularly relevant to morality. True morality is objective, but making objectivity the opposite of subjectivity has led us to believe that, like an on-off light switch, you can have one or the other but not both. Subjectivity, in this view, precludes objectivity and vice versa. If you want to be objective, you must eliminate the subjective (usually accomplished, it seems, by blocking out feelings). And this says something about what we have done with this dichotomy; we have made it into a bi-polar hierarchy—one above the other, one better than the other. And because of the way we have understood the two in our rationalistic tradition, we have put objectivity higher because, seemingly more rational, it is held in greater esteem. We want people to make objective moral judgments, those that are realistic and true, not those that are mere fantasy, rationalization, or whimsey but those that conform to the way things are objectively. If they are mutually exclusive, then traditionally one must surrender to our own experience in favor of cool reason.

But this is only a pseudo-dilemma. Saying that subjectivity and objectivity are opposites is like saying "mother" and "child" are opposites. The mother is not opposite; both she and her child exist side by side in a relationship. She is the source; the child comes from the mother. Objectivity is the child of subjectivity; objectivity comes from subjectivity.

The novel and movie, The Accidental Tourist (Tyler, 1985), puts living characters in the places of objectivity and subjectivity. Macon is a travel writer who hates to travel and thus writes books for people who want to find familiar things (like McDonald's) in strange locales. He visits and reviews cities such as Paris and Rome to find what is American in them. On his trips, as in his life, he carries baggage that not only burdens him with the familiar but builds walls around himself to keep out new experiences. Macon's travel writing is objective; he has been there and describes what is there very objectively. His life is disturbed, however, when he meets the manic, historic Muriel who has never been out of the country but has deeply experienced both the good and bad things of life. In the course of the narrative, life experienced subjectively turns out to have something to teach objectivity.

In the last analysis we all have in evaluating our own subjective experience, but when the aim of subjective experience is objectivity, it cannot be just any old subjectivity. Objectivity comes from a modified subjectivity, a special kind of subjectivity—authentic subjectivity. Bernard Lonergan (1974), the great Canadian philosopher-theologian, summed it up in one telling sentence: "Objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity" (p. 214).

Bernard Lonergan and Authentic Subjectivity

What did Lonergan mean by authentic subjectivity? Probably something akin to what Martin Heidegger meant by the term eigentlich. Heidegger wished to signify not only the connotation of genuineness but the notion of being genuinely self-possessed—an isolation that brings us, freed from illusions, into the roundness of action. He insisted that this is not excessive idealism but the outcome of sober understanding. "With the sober dread that brings us face to face with one's being-able-to-be by oneself, joy arrayed in strength goes hand in hand" (Heidegger, cited in Schmitt, 1965, p. 184).

Lonergan gives us, I think, a more relevant (and less morose) view. Stewart (1981), an interpreter of Lonergan, develops the point nicely in his explanation of Lonergan's philosophy:

Slowly one becomes oneself. It takes time to develop from being a "subject" in a sensitive world of immediacy to a "self" in the adult world of meaning. The process is one of self-creation. One moves from empirical to intellectual consciousness to rational consciousness to rational self-consciousness. (p. 175)
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Paradoxically, for all its connotations of space and objects, the horizon of significance metaphor is ultimately concerned with psychic space and self-consciousness, that most distinguishing mark of the human mind. The horizon of significance, for all its vastness, is a space given over to self-organization. To pile paradox on paradox, the signals of transcendence that dot the horizon lure one on beyond oneself toward a transcendent Being who, in turn, calls one to self-transcendence.

Lonergan (1973) says:

Man [sic] achieves authenticity in self-transcendence. That achievement is the result of judging and deciding for oneself. We make judgments of fact and judgments of value. Merely knowing speculatively what is moral is not enough. It is only in performance, in the actual pursuit of the moral good, that one achieves self-transcendence. With decision and choice comes the realization that through these acts one makes oneself either an authentic or an inauthentic subject. To ask whether something is worthwhile or not means to ask more than whether it gives me pleasure or pain, whether it is good for me as an individual. My questions seek to determine whether it is truly good, whether it is of objective value. When I live by my answers to questions of objective value I effect in myself a moral self-transcendence. (p. 104)

Finding the Self

Before leaving Lonergan, I would like to put what he is saying about the self in a contemporary context. One major critic of our time, Philip Cushman, does not see the process of self-discovery for the majority of contemporary men and women as very satisfying. Cushman (1990) maintains that "the present configuration of the bounded, masterful self is the empty self" (p. 600). The Victorian, restricted self has given way to the empty self, seeking to be soothed and made cohesive by being filled up with food, consumer products, and celebrities. Today people experience a significant absence of community, tradition and shared meaning. It is as though humans have striven for autonomy for centuries, and now, having attained it in large measure, they discover it is empty. Humans in North American society consequently yearn to acquire and consume as an unconscious way of compensating for what has been lost. (Cushman, 1990, p. 600)

Cushman’s dark conclusions may well apply to many who dare to search for their moral selves. But such a negative outcome is not inevitable. We live in a period dubbed "postmodern." It has characteristics that are self-enhancing and community-enhancing if fully appreciated. Postmodernism shuns the determinism of outside pseudo-objective standards, turning inward instead for self-established standards. One outcome of this could be a kind of narcissism reminiscent of the "me generation." Some may presume that self-discovery is a lonely reflecting pond where one could gaze down into the pool to admire one's image as figure against the ground of an empty sky. The image may be entirely of self. If there are others in the scene, they are huddled out of sight somewhere beyond the horizon of significance. They could be summoned to be used if Narcissus' need arose.

True (objective) self-discovery is done in a broader contextual field, a field of relationships. If I am a person, I am by nature in relationships; if I truly find myself, I find myself only in relationships, for that is what I am, a system of relationships—relationships that extend to other people and, as we are only now appreciating, to the universe. Authenticity calls me, aware of the perspectives of the larger context, to transcend myself and to choose engagement especially through relationships of responsibility and care.

Charles Taylor and the Ethic of Authenticity


The ethic of authenticity is, he claims, something relatively new and peculiar to our culture. Intuitive feeling for right and wrong has been placed in competition with traditional calculations of the consequences of moral behavior, especially those approaches that were concerned with divine retribution. The ethic of authenticity insists that the sources of goodness and morality are deep within us. It has its roots in the common conviction that each of us has an original way of being human. Consequently, fidelity to self is important. Being true to myself is being true to my own originality; that is something only I can discover and articulate. However, this credo has been known to lead to narcissism and an individualistic idealism. "I do my thing and you do yours." Paradoxically, this "self-fulfillment" can be self-defeating if it ignores our ties with others or limits itself to narcissistic desires. It can lead to moral subjectivity in its worst sense. But moral signposts, like highway signposts, are valuable for their significance, which is to give clear direction. There is a special significance in giving shape to my own life. This we call autonomy. But even if I get my sense of the significance of my life from its being self-chosen, this depends on an understanding that this must be done in a broader context of responsibility for society. Rather than a narrow individualism, Taylor proposes a healthy autonomy that does not just concentrate on individual freedom but also goes beyond to propose models of society. Individualism as a moral principle or ideal must offer some view of how the individual should live with others. Recognizing differences requires a shared horizon of significance. If contemporary thinking (including contemporary psychological theories of development) centers fulfillment only on the individual, relationships become purely instrumental, neglecting the demands coming from beyond one's own desires.

Taylor (1981) says that "The struggle ought not to be over authenticity, for or against, but about it, defining its proper meaning. We ought to be trying to lift the
culture back up, closer to its motivating ideal” (p. 73). Continuing, Taylor (1991) says, “I can find fulfillment in God, or a political cause, or tending the earth. Indeed, the argument above suggests that we will find genuine fulfillment only in something like this, which has significance independent of us or our desires” (p. 82).

I have given considerable attention to Charles Taylor on this point of putting oneself in a moral perspective not only for the intrinsic value of what he says but because what he has to say clarifies notions of contemporary moral culture and supports values such as autonomy and authenticity. This helps us see the kind of growth possible not just as personal but as moral development. It helps us to see that the danger is fragmentation; the solution is people forming a common purpose and actually living it out. Perhaps one last quote from Taylor (1989) will sum up the morality issue and put it in perspective too.

Being a self is inseparable from existing in a space of moral issues, to do with identity and how one ought to be. It is being able to find one’s standpoint, being able to occupy, to be a perspective in it (p. 112).

That’s a novel (and important) idea: To be a perspective, not just to have but to be a perspective. It seems to imply an active role in shaping morality and, in our present context, to influence it, even to create it by what we as humans have to offer to help bring design out of chaos. It is our choice. It is a different view from the traditional objectivist stance which is to see value solely “out there” in the object itself, waiting to be discovered by the “objective” observer. Instead the value is not solely in the observer or the observed but in the interaction between the two. Robert Pirsig (1991) put it succinctly in his novel-philosophical novel Lila when he said, “Between the subject and the object lies the value” (p. 66). To have a perspective may mean simply to take value solely as somehow contained entirely in things or (second hand) in given norms. To be a perspective is first to find oneself in a horizon of significance and, consequently, to transcend that self in a relationship of self to value, so that one’s values actually provide the guiding norms so naturally, so instinctively, that morality is not something called upon inconsistently, but is a consistent life dynamism. This ideal of being a perspective, I think, like a Bach canon, takes up the theme of authenticity running through Heidegger, Lonergan, and Taylor, inviting us to play personal variations on the theme. If to be a perspective means something more than simply being a moral model, it is important to see morality not as something someone has but what one is. The renewed interest in “Character Education” exemplified by Lickona (1991) seems to have this idea much better in hand than some of the older rationalistic approaches such as Kohlberg’s, which reduced morality almost to the level of a skill to be acquired and called upon in times of moral dilemmas.

One day I put a dilemma to my undergraduate class in religious and moral development, concocting a scenario in which it would be “safe” for any one of them to steal an expensive gold watch from a department store. I asked them why they would not steal the watch. After many “reasons” from the class, one girl said, “I wouldn’t steal it because that wouldn’t be mine.” That answer, serene and simple, would not get her points in a Kohlberg-scored dilemma, but it does speak of character and self-respect. Perhaps ultimately we behave morally out of respect for what we are—a perspective even to ourselves. At higher levels than guilt or social obligation circumscribe, we take on moral obligation out of respect for our own integrity.

Dabrowski and Authentic Morality

Some larger, grander psychological vision is needed to put the themes of authentic subjectivity in full developmental context. It must be supportive of individual autonomy, yet sensitive to the issues of a broader social context. For this major synthesizing role, I am presenting Dabrowski’s (1967, 1972, 1973; Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Dabrowski, with Kawczak & Piechowski, 1970; Dabrowski, with Piechowski, 1977) Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD). Space will not allow a thorough description of this theory here. Readers are referred to summary articles such as Karen Nelson’s (1989) short but thorough review in Volume One of this journal.

Dabrowski’s TPD, far from being just another self-fulfillment psychology, encourages a high but not heady idealism even Heidegger would admire. It calls for self-transcendence through a holistic collaboration of intellect and emotion which is resonant of Lonergan. It proposes, as does Taylor, authenticity as the route to objectivity. These are big claims which now must be supported. Let me do it by enumerating some of the themes of TPD that are particularly pertinent.

TPD is idealistic. It is not traditional ontogenetic theory, describing normal or average development. It is clearly a call to move on to higher possibilities. It deals with the issue of higher levels of development not just in implicit but explicit terms.

Quality is the measure. Dabrowski, far from any behavioristic leanings, saw development in qualitative terms of movement from simplicity to greater complexity, but with better articulation and hence a higher level of integration.

TPD takes a moral stance. It is remarkable that a psychological theory conceived more than 25 years ago could buck the then prevailing model of psychology as a value-free science. The physical sciences have claimed this territory for their objectivity, which often meant “free of values.” Psychology, admiring its big brother, took up the same stance in order to become a respectable science. Even outside the behavioristic school some psychologists shunned values or at least felt uncomfortable with obligation. Karen Horney (1950) had previously pointed out the terrible tyranny that “shoulds” can have over neurotic people, but Albert Ellis (1975), for one, went much farther, demanding that we stamp out any sense of obligation by labeling shoulds as neurotic and, therefore, sick. Concern for values was unknown, and seeking a moral course for one’s life or even finding a moral obligation was a symptom rationality could soon cure. That Dabrowski held to the importance of values and dared to recognize hierarchies of values as directive of one’s life course is much to his credit and much to the enrichment of the theory, particularly today when we term our value-less society.

TPD is distinguished by its call to higher standards. Included in the high ideals of TPD are high moral standards. High ideals make strong demands. High
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standards need strong sources. Weak sources, such as feelings of obligation or guilt or self-satisfaction, are insufficient for strong morals because ultimately they are egoistic. Dabrowski knew this when he imaged his most highly developed people as being beyond mere ego and being integral, whole, authentic, and thus eminently moral.

TPD has a sense of the painful and sometimes tragic realities of life. Dabrowski’s European origins, his experience in two wars, his association with Freud, and his study of existentialism appear here. Other psychologies (particularly some on the North American continent) may pull us back from the rugged spiritual ascent Dabrowski proposed, offering instead an easy way, a painless way, a “practical” way—all to be accomplished perhaps in one “intensive weekend.” Dabrowski’s theory makes no such promises; the theory itself has the honesty of authenticity. To handle the demands of higher levels of development, far from promising an easy way free of stress, it emphasizes the developmental opportunities of distress, disintegration, and breakdown of lower level structures. The difficulties of the higher route are not only clearly indicated but recognized as necessary. If TPD told us nothing more about morality, it would tell us this: High moral ground is won like all high ground in TPD through struggle, pain, dissolution, and disillusionment. The highest ideals are potentially the most destructive. But what a force is he or she who not only has a moral perspective, but is a perspective!

TPD is based on clear values. One of the merits of TPD is that it makes its values clear. Kazninzer, Dabrowski’s values were out front where he had placed them for his own review and where others could examine them. One could disagree even vociferously with him, but one knew just where Dabrowski took his stand. He was careful to make the foundational values of TPD explicit, and this is one of the qualities that makes it outstanding. It is teleological; it knows where it wants to go, what its goals are, and enunciates in value terms why those goals are truly worthwhile.

Table 2 (adapted from various writings of Dabrowski) will help make clear the basic values of TPD that distinguish lower and higher levels. It is important to note that the pairings in this table are not pairs of opposites or dichotomies; they are rather poles on a value continuum which may be a miniature value hierarchy, moving from the less desirable on the left to the more desirable on the right, with numerous shades of variation between.

Emotion has a valued place. The role of emotion in moral judgment has usually been sidestepped in favor of the seemingly more objective “reason.” Valuing, however, is about attraction to worthwhile. Feeling is the key player. TPD from the beginning has recognized and studied and given credit to the power and guiding force of emotionality. Its holistic approach to the person foreshadowed the newer psycho-biological appreciations of the guiding and choosing functions of the whole of the nervous system, not just the cerebral cortex (Pearce, 1992).

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<tr>
<td>Value Determinants of Dabrowski’s Levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biological—psychophysical</td>
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<td>Reductionism: Human is “nothing but...” Human is continuous with creation, but unique</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victim of heredity and environment</td>
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<td>Reactive, unreflective, uninhibited</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjustment to “What is”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primitive, biological and instinctive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heteronomous, socially determined</td>
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<td>Victim of lower instincts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illusion</td>
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<td>Lack of concern for meaning</td>
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<td>Egoistic</td>
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<td>Rigid</td>
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<td>Whimsical, arbitrary subjectivity</td>
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<td>“Religion” structure for self-protection</td>
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TPD is conducive to interiority. This is a rare quality of any major psychological theory. Valuing requires a reflexive stance. We have to turn inward and become aware of our own activity and of the processes that form us. TPD encourages reflection rather than impulsiveness and superficiality. Self-consciousness implies deep inner reflection. We have to turn inward and become aware of our own activity and of the processes that form us. We have to take charge of constructing our own representation of the world—to find some sort of order or form in the chaos. We have, in other words, to take charge of shaping our character. This can only be carried out in the first person. Becoming aware of one’s own thinking and habits allows one to disengage from them and objectify them.

Dabrowski used the word “inhibition” to describe one of the outcomes of reflection (see Table 2). In Dabrowski’s thinking, inhibition should restrict not only stimuli coming into the nervous system but control those going out. This word inhibition with all its pejorative connotations, does not sit well with many people. It connotes suppression which, we have been told, is sick. But in Dabrowski’s value system, inhibition means holding back those automatic and lower tendencies that stunt full growth and interfere with the higher dynamics. Even on a purely biological level, inhibition makes sanity and life itself possible; one would live frenetically if he or she could not be reacted uncontrollably to every stimulus. Think of how many stimuli we inhibit in the task of driving a car. It is only by screening out the distracting and irrelevant signals and attuning to those which are significant that we keep the car on the road.

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Dabrowksi, following the great classical moralists, calls on us to stop living an unreflective life. One possible response to this call, as we have seen, is to confuse reflection with narcissism. Dabrowksi turns us rather toward an objective order through disengagement, calling us to a separation from ourselves through self-objectification—what some developmentalists have called “distanciation.” The whole picture of self as objectified nature that this reflexive stance of TDP proposes becomes available only through what Allport (1961) called “self-objectification,” what Dabrowksi called “subject-object in oneself,” and Charles Taylor calls “disengagement.” Taylor insists that disengagement (and, I add, objectivity) comes not only through inhibiting doctrines but through all the disciplines inseparable from our modern way of life, the disciplines of self-control in the economic, moral, and sexual fields. Again, I think Dabrowksi anticipated this with his use of the good, old-fashioned word inhibition, used not in a puritanical sense but as a neural damping of that which is lower level or, at very least, distracting from the aim of higher development.

**TDP is anagogy.** A quality of TDP that is akin to superiority is its anagogy 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 self-transcendence toward a oneness with all that is (see Nixon, 1990; also pp. 57-74 in this issue).

Creation Spirituality (Berry, 1988; Capra & Steindl-Rast, 1992) celebrates this vision of the seamless whole of all that is and invites us to be a positive participant in the process of creation. TDP anticipates these insights; it deserves exploration of its spiritual dimensions. It does so especially when many, shunning institutional religion, feel an intense hunger which, upon reflection, they recognize as spiritual.

We look now at some of the dynamics, the shapers of development, that are particularly relevant to moral development: autonomy, subject-object in oneself, and, of course, authenticity.

**Autonomy**

There is in TDP a strong emphasis on autonomy, not in the sense of isolation from others, but as the acceptance of responsibility for one’s immediate actions as well as (and this distinguishes TDP from many other theories) for the overall direction of 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 Dabrowksi called, the “third factor.” There is a large (but not total) element, called 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 Dabrowksi. Development itself is thus a moral issue. Dabrowksi’s background in existentialism shows here. Two other Dabrowksi dynamisms stand out as especially relevant to our present theme: authenticity and subject-object in oneself. Let’s take the latter first.

**Subject-Object in Oneself**

Subject-object in oneself is a fascinating dynamism. Once we get past the rather awkward name, we see it displays Dabrowksi’s depth of understanding. First, we see an appreciation that subjectivity and objectivity are not mutually exclusive but, in fact, a working combination. Second, we observe an appreciation of the passages of life, beginning with a truncated subjectivity. We are all at birth experts in subjectivity. We know what we like and what we don’t like, and we soon learn to let others know our preferences—even before the concept “other” emerges. The child moves out of the subjective, egocentric world of the infant to find others and consequently to find self. In the beginning it is, by way of mere contrast, as “not-others” and later as a self in relationships, later still as a self who does not have but is relationships. Knowing our own subjective experience is relatively easy; knowing something of others’ subjective experience (standing in their place) is a little harder. Knowing the self objectively is harder still, and presenting this self to others objectivity is probably hardest of all. It is called authenticity, and it involves actually being what you seem to be before the scrutinizing eye of others (and still more difficult) before the reflective eye of self.

**Authenticity**

Dabrowksi talks about authenticity as a dynamism of development. Then he goes on to describe the role of “authenticism.” Probably the briefest and clearest way to present these two ideas is in a table (see Table 3).

You can see in this description of the person at the higher levels of development the theme of authentic subjectivity proposed by our trio of philosophers. The authentic self is someone who experiences the world and self in it through a wide range of what Dabrowksi calls “overexcitabilities” (see Nelson, 1989)—not being limited to the sensual and immediate, a person who has moved from the reactive to the proactive, from impulsivity to reflection, from mere value words to congruent value actions. In Dabrowski’s terms, the person at higher levels of development not only has developed a hierarchy of values but a hierarchy of aims that actually influences his or her behavior in a consistent life pattern; what ought to be is.

TDP clearly endorses that the pursuit of the ideal self is not a regression to individualism with all the narcissism and soft relativism that go with it. High level, objective morality is attained only through authentic subjectivity.
Conclusion

All we have in our moral quest is our subjectivity, and that is enough. But to arrive at conclusions of praxis that truly are moral, mere subjectivity with all its whims and machinations is not enough; it must be authentic. In the movement from is to ought, we must have the perspective of our individual horizon of significance. This is a step up from the lowest level objectivity of simply seeing what is. It is an upward motion to having a perspective (a sense of relative value) about how things ought to be. But, the best human beings do not simply have a perspective; they have arrived at a level where one is a perspective. The moral ideal and the real are one. To be a perspective is realized not only in the sense of being a moral model but in the fuller, richer sense of actually creating moral objectivity. This is, I think, what Dabrowski meant by the dynamism of subject-object in oneself. One can, in growing degrees through the course of development, comprehend the other as subject and the self as object. One can then transcend the self in a union with the seamless whole of creation in which what is actually is what ought to be.

Those who dare to take the high moral ground are often ignored as irrelevant by most of us, transfigured as we are by mere celebrities as models of how one ought to be. But, though they are often shunned as different, those who think, those who feel, those who give birth, those who laugh, those who dance on the stillpoint of the turning earth, those who attend to the poetry that is life, whose speaking and seeking is of beauty and for transcending value, are the most revolutionary and evolutionary among us. They are doorways to another dimension that, if trusted, leads beyond the superficial world of conformity to an authentic morality.

Fortunately, we don't have to climb the highest mountains to know something about them, even looking at the map will give some idea. But actually climbing or even attempting some of the lesser peaks will give perspective and a better sense of what it must be like on the summits that mark the Great Divide.

REFERENCES


Authentic Morality


To be authentic does not mean to be natural, to be as you are, but as you ought to be.

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Nothing which is authentically idealized is conquered easily. High values are hard to reach or are beyond reach. But this is the idealists’ problem. The others, the realists who know the "real" side of ideal, are different. They care not about authenticity of realization. According to them, they know ideals and realize them very easily.

—Kazimierz Dabrowski—