An Exercise in Disidentification

Following Roberto Assagioli's original exercises in disidentification (Assagioli, 1965, 1973), psychosynthesis therapists have produced many variants. They are all designed to elicit the elusive experience of "I-ness."

Here is an example for you:

(A suggestion: read the exercise slowly onto a tape recorder. This will allow you to be both focused and relaxed as you go through the exercise.)

Relax. ... Without trying to alter it in any way, be aware of your breath gently moving in and out. ... Be aware of your heart's rhythmic beat. ... Be aware of the wonderful way your body runs on its own...maintaining ongoing health and balance. ... Relax deeply....

Let memories, like old photographs, bring to mind your body's appearance over the years...as a baby...as a child...as a teenager...as a young adult...as now. ... Realize: my body moves through continual changes, fluctuation of health and energy, attrition and renewal. ... Know: I am the one who is aware of these changes.

Allow yourself to be aware of your present mood. ... Name it. Looking back across the past few minutes, hours, days, realize how your moods, emotions, feelings and desires have ebbed and flowed. ... Be aware of the life and vitality of your emotions...how they vary, like the play of light and shadow in a March sky. ... Realize: my emotions change in mood, polarity, tone and intensity all the time. ... Know: I am the one who is aware of these changes.

Turn to your thoughts...take time to observe your own thoughtflow...see how, in the stream of consciousness, associations form and dissolve...and are overtaken by new trains of thought. ... Be aware of the intricacy and richness of your thought life. ... Realize: my mind is a treasure house of observations, insights, speculations and fantasy. ... My thoughts are ever changing. ... Know: I as the one who is aware of these changes.

Realize: I am a point of constant awareness...I am the one at the center of my consciousness. ... I AM THE SELF.

Elizabeth Maxwell

Self as Phoenix:
A Comparison of Assagioli’s and Dabrowski’s Developmental Theories

Elizabeth Maxwell

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ABSTRACT: Two developmental theories, Psychosynthesis and the Theory of Positive Disintegration, both inclusive of higher level development, are compared as to structure and content. The similar vision of the theorists, Roberto Assagioli and Kazimierz Dabrowski, is noted, as well as their recognition of many psychological symptoms as heralds of growth. The two theories are seen as complementary as well as mutually reinforcing. Particular attention is paid to the dynamics which foster growth at higher levels.

“Know thyself,” challenged Socrates, unsettling his students and us all. Who this self is seems unfathomable, philosophically or psychologically. The search for self can be like looking into a mirror that is looking into another mirror. Behaviorists have avoided this problem altogether by observing only outer measurable actions. Others have looked at ego structure, ego function, self as feedback construction, self as disconer of objects, self in relationship: all parts of the puzzle.

This article looks at two psychiatrists who did not try to solve the puzzle but who simply recognized the importance of self as central to growth and transformation. Their perspectives and their nomenclature were different. One spoke specifically of the self; the other used the term, the Third Factor, a dynamic force (or dynamism) whose activity echoed the functions of self and which was referred to as “i.e. all the autonomous forces” (Dabrowski, 1970, p.34). But for both the authentic action of self was a key to growth.

A sense of self is our most intimate possession, part and parcel of being alive in the world. It focuses all our experience and is a point of orientation within the flow of changes that continually occur without and within. We know we change: shape, size, skills, beliefs, roles, acquisitions, loss and gain,
Self as Phoenix

psychoanalysis into Italy, but soon moved on to develop his own theory of 

psychosynthesis—the integration of the whole being, not just a “look at the 

basement,” as he characterized Freud’s work.

His dissatisfaction with Freud stemmed from what he saw as Freud’s 

preoccupation with the lower unconscious, whereas Assagioli posited and 

affirmed the reality of both a middle unconscious and a higher unconscious, 

the “Superconscious.” This highest level of consciousness contains such 

energies as inspiration, creativity, genius, altruistic love and intuition. This 

subject will be dealt with in more detail further on.

In concurrence, Dabrowski, describing the upward movement of an 

individual with rich developmental potential, echoes: “He attempts to go 

beyond a sense-oriented, rationalist empiricism, since he recognizes it to be 

only one level of reality, and attempts to reach the higher level of synthesis, 

intuition, existential and transcendental experience” (Dabrowski, 1970, p. 

333). Like Assagioli, Dabrowski found Freudian psychoanalysis unsatisfactory 

because it lacked multilevelness. Consistently he sought evidence 

within theories of the differing value levels he saw everywhere. He decried 

the transposition of stimulus-response experiments, such as Pavlov’s, to the 

“complex, subtle and multilevel human mechanisms. I could not accept 

certain theories...which associated human development with external 

conditions only and did not take into account the developmental potential 

of the inner psychic milieu” (Dabrowski, in Pichowski, 1975, pp. 234-235). 

Dabrowski was oriented to the subjective inner landscape where the tug of 

values which shape our growth takes place. Emotions are an integral part 

of that landscape and emotional development is at the heart of Dabrowski’s 

work.

This article presents a comparison of psychosynthesis with 

Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration. Each theory tends to flesh 

out the other and to reinforce the emphasis on seeing psychological difficulties 

in context and with awareness that greater health may be breaking through 

apparent problems. The congruence of the two theories is remarkable. 

Apparent both theorists saw the same reality, although from different 

points of view. In their vision, the scope of their theories and their ability to 

integrate suffering, the “abnormal”—even despair and suicidal ideation— 

within the forces of growth, together they affirm a truly positive picture for 

humanity.

Dabrowski’s Theory

Kazimierz Dabrowski, both a psychologist and psychiatrist, was also 

a poet and musician with wide-ranging intellectual and philosophical 

curiosity. He studied under Piaget in 1928-1929, underwent psychoanalytic 

training and analysis in Vienna under Steckel in 1930, attended Pierre Janet’s 

lectures in Paris in 1931 and studied at Boston Psychiatric Hospital in
1934–1935. From 1935 until 1948, he was the Director of the Polish State Mental Hygiene Institute and also of the Institute for Mental Hygiene in Warsaw, which he founded with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation. This institute, which had branches in several Polish cities, carried forward his vision of emphasizing the health (or hygiene) in the field of mental health. His work was disrupted by both the Nazis and the Communists. Finally, in 1964, he left Poland to continue his work at the University of Alberta, where he was Visiting Professor of Psychology until his death in 1980 (Folio, 1981).

In his theory, Dabrowski saw five distinct levels of human development. These are non-ontological; they do not occur within the different phases of an individual lifetime—they are states of orientation from which humanity as a whole operates. The levels stretch from a primitive, egocentric integration at Level I through a disintegrative process, at first spontaneous and later self-directed, to a higher integration—one characterized by authenticity, altruism and universal values at Level V. It is the primitive ego structure which disintegrates. That disintegration is positive because it opens the way to eventual integration at a higher level.

An excellent overview of these levels is found in Volume I of Advanced Development (Nelson, 1989). A summary of Nelson's description of levels follows on the next page.

Notes: 1. The relation between Dabrowski's Level IV and Maslow's self-actualization has been noted and described in detail (Piechowski, 1978, Piechowski & Tyska, 1982, Brennan & Piechowski, 1991.) Maslow lists these characteristics of healthy self-actualizers as:

1. Clearer, more efficient perception of reality.
2. More openness to experience.
3. Increased integration, wholeness, and unity of the person.
4. Increased spontaneity, expressiveness; full functioning; aliveness.
5. A real self; a firm identity; autonomy, uniqueness.
6. Increased objectivity, detachment, transcendence of self.
8. Ability to fuse concreteness and abstractness.
10. Ability to love, etc.

(Maslow, 1968, p.157)

2. Developmental theories usually stop at the self-actualization level, if they haven't already peaked at the "good citizen" level. TPD posits Level V (Secondary Integration) — above Shadow struggle and inner conflict. It is important to recognize this as real territory, a country that exists and potentially beckons all.

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DABROWSKI'S THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION
Karen C. Nelson

(Excerpted from descriptions of levels in Advanced Development, 1989, 1, pp.5-9)

Level I: Primary Integration
At Level I, Primary Integration, egocentrism prevails. A person at this level lacks the capacity for empathy and self-examination. When things go wrong, someone else is always to blame; self-responsibility is not a Level I characteristic. With nothing within to inhibit personal ambition, Level I individuals often attain power in society by ruthless means.

Level II: Unilevel Disintegration
Level II individuals are influenced primarily by their social group and by mainstream values, or they are moral relativists for whom "anything goes," morally speaking. They often exhibit ambivalent feelings and indecisive behavior because they have no clear cut set of self-determined internal values. At Level II, inner conflict is horizontal, a competition between equal, competing values.

Level III: Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration
At Level III, multilevelness arises. The person develops a hierarchical sense of values. Inner conflict is vertical, a struggle to bring one's behavior up to higher standards. There is a dissatisfaction with what one is, because of a competing sense of what one could and ought to be (personality ideal). This internal struggle between higher and lower can be accompanied by existential despair, anxiety, depression, and feelings of dissatisfaction with the self (inferiority, disquietude, astonishment).

Level IV: Organized Multilevel Disintegration
In comparison to those at Level III (the level of emotional tumult), Level IV individuals are well on the road to self-actualization. They have found a way to reach their own ideals, and they are effective leaders in society. They show high levels of responsibility, authenticity, reflective judgment, empathy for others, autonomy of thought and action, self-awareness, and other attributes associated with self-actualization.

Level V: Secondary Integration
At Level V the struggle for self-mastery has been won. Inner conflicts regarding the self have been resolved through actualization of the personality ideal. Disintegration has been transcended by the integration of one's values and ideals into one's living and being. The life is lived in service to humanity. It is lived according to the highest, most universal principles of loving, compassionate regard for the worth of the human individual.

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How does one move upward through the levels? One indicator is *developmental potential*. This is the sum total of all creative abilities, talents and interests one is born with, together with the innate *overexcitabilities* (heightened energies expressing through psychomotor, sensual, imagina-
tional, intellectual and emotional modes). Developmental potential “deter-
mines what level of development a person may reach under optimum
conditions” (Piechowski, 1979, p. 28). A person with strong developmental
potential has innately more intense and complex interacting energies—
“more steam up” to force disintegration and so foster growth. Among these
energies are *dynamisms*, dynamic interior forces which foster positive
disintegration. Intense, prolonged personal struggle is involved in this
transformational process, wherein one painfully makes oneself anew to meet
the insistent ideal that is one’s unique highest vision.

For in-depth explication of this complex theory, please refer to
Dabrowksi’s publications, such as *Positive Disintegration* (1964), *Personality
Shaping Through Positive Disintegration* (1967), *Mental Growth Through Positive
Disintegration* (1970), and *Psychoneurosis is Not an Illness* (1972), as well as the
two-volume work written with M. M. Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of
Emotional Development* (1977). See also articles by Nelson, Hague, Ogburn-
Colangelo in *Advanced Development*, Volume 1 (1989), Piechowski in *Advanced
Development*, Volume 2 (1990), and Spaltro in *Advanced Development*, Volume

**Psychosynthesis: Basic Concepts**

Now let us turn to psychosynthesis, Roberto Assagioli’s overview of the
human psyche inclusive of the heights of possible development. Assagioli
recalls that the ideas of this system go back as far as his doctoral thesis on
psychoanalysis in 1910 (Assagioli, 1965). In 1911 he presented his view on the
unconscious at the International Congress in Bologna, Italy. By 1926 these
ideas had led to the founding of the Instituto di Psicosintesi in Rome, where
the aim was “to achieve the psychosynthesis of patients, and, in the educa-
tional field, of pupils” (Assagioli, 1965, p.280). The 1992 International
Psychosynthesis Directory lists a dozen Italian cities which house the
Istituto di Psicosintesi as well as 13 other countries where psychosynthesis
centers exist.

Just what is psychosynthesis? The word itself is formed from the Greek
roots meaning “self” (psyche) and “wholeness” or “integration” (synthesis).
It aims at the healthy integration of the personality, but its most radical
postulate is the existence of a higher unconscious. Just as Freud uncovered
for us the reality of the lower unconscious, Assagioli asserted the reality of
what he termed the Superconscious, a collection of energies beyond our
usual conscious awareness. These energies, of a higher nature, are real. He
insisted that they are not merely the sublimation of repressed, lower
unconscious material but have validity on their own as real, able-to-be-
experienced forces that can shape and transform our lives. Assagioli’s “Egg
Diagram,” well-known in psychosynthesis circles, probably best illustrates
his view of the psyche:

![Figure 1: The Psyche](image)

1. The Lower Unconscious
2. The Middle Unconscious
3. The Higher Unconscious or Superconsciuos
4. The Field of Consciousness
5. The Conscious Self or “I”
6. The Higher Self

Here the Lower Unconscious is basically Freudian territory with its
fundamental drives and primitive urges, its complexes, repressed material
and primal energy—the Id. Assagioli (1965) adds “elementary psychologi-
cal activities which direct the life of the body; the intelligent co-ordination
of bodily functions” (p.17). He notes the presence of “dreams and imaginations
of an inferior kind” (p.17), laying the groundwork for his assertion that there
exist dreams and imaginings that are superior in nature.
The Middle Unconscious contains "psychological elements similar to those of our waking consciousness and easily accessible to it" (p. 17). It is a repository of information being assimilated and elaborated. If we were to look at this in Piagetian terms, we might say that it is here that our schemas are reworked. Here "our ordinary mental and imaginative activities are elaborated and developed in a sort of psychological gestation process before their birth into the light of consciousness" (p. 17).

The Superconscious contains the sources of our ...higher intuitions and inspirations—artistic, philosophic or scientific, ethical "imperatives" and urges to humanitarian and heroic action. It is the source of the higher feelings, such as altruistic love; of genius and of the states of contemplation, illumination, and ecstasy. In this realm are latent the higher psychic functions and spiritual energies. (Assagioli, 1965, pp. 17-18)

The pull of the highest in us is real and significant...

Another basic psychosynthesis reality shown in Figure 2 is the self or "I," which is not just a structure built of others' feedback or of our own role models—not our self-concept or Jungian persona—but is the very center of our being, irreducible, and able to be experienced free of its assimilated content. Assagioli insisted upon the reality and experientially verifiable nature of the self and describes it as a "point of pure self-awareness...the center of our consciousness" (p. 18). The self is as difficult to describe and as basic as the Euclidian dimensionless point. It is equally foundational. The "Egg Diagram" discloses that there is actually a continuum of possible self-experience stretching from the personal self at the center of the Field of Consciousness up to the Higher or Transpersonal Self. (See Figure 1 for this relationship.)

What is the Transpersonal Self?

eVariously referred to as the Self, the Higher Self, the Spiritual Self, or the "Higher I," this is a "permanent center...a true self" which exists above the varying states of consciousness we may experience (Assagioli, 1965, p.18). Much closer to Jung’s concept of the Self as that which urges and fosters growth and wholeness (Jung, 1959), the Transpersonal Self is often envisioned as a wise sage, a loving, patient guide and mentor (Assagioli, 1991). Assagioli speaks of "vertical telepathy" between this Sage and our personal self (pp.82-86). He goes further to assert: "There are not really two selves, two independent and separate entities. The Self is one; it manifests in different degrees of awareness and self-realization." (Assagioli, 1965, p.20).

However, although experience of the Transpersonal Self is possible (Richard Bucke’s Cosmic Consciousness [1901] is a description of this), the vast majority of self-awareness occurs at the level of personal self.
To Jung’s (1971) original four functions—thought, feeling, sensation and intuition, Assagioli has added two more: imagination and impulse-desire (Assagioli, 1973). Note the central position of the will. He is very clear that our usual notion of will as a stern taskmaster is erroneous:

Most misunderstandings and mistakes concerning the will arise from the frequent misconception that the strong will constitutes the whole will. Strength is only one of the aspects of the will, and when dissociated from the others, it can be, and often is, ineffectual or harmful to oneself and other people. (Assagioli, 1973, p.15)

Assagioli saw the will as essential actualizing energy. He recognized it as the missing ingredient in many psychotherapies, and believed it to be of immense value in moving us all toward wholeness, or full integration of all our faculties. As he wrote in his book on the subject, The Act of Will,

The discovery of the will in oneself, and even more the realization that the self and the will are intimately connected, may come as a real revelation which can change, often radically, a person’s self-awareness and his whole attitude toward himself, other people, and the world. He perceives that he is a “living subject” endowed with the power to choose, to relate, to bring about changes in his own personality, in others, in circumstances. This enhanced awareness, this “awakening” and vision of new, unlimited potentialities for inner expansion and outer action, gives a new feeling of confidence, security, joy—a sense of “wholeness.” (Assagioli, 1973 p.9)

Psychosynthesis: Stages of Growth

Roberto Assagioli did not define separate levels of human psychological experience as did Kazimierz Dabrowski, but was aware of various stages of integration, or synthesis. The majority of people, he felt, are prone to inner conflict. He was referring not to the conflict between the higher and lower within us, so characteristic of Dabrowski’s Level III, but to a unilevel confusion of conflicting desires, beliefs, cross-purposes and unresolved issues. He stated, “A realistic observation of the flow of the psychological life in ourselves and in others shows clearly the existence of a number of differing and conflicting tendencies, which at times constitute the nuclei of semi-independent sub-personalities” (Assagioli, 1965, p.36). Because we tend to identify with these subpersonalities far more than we realize our true selfhood, much of our lives are lived in a muddle of recurrent trauma, like a self-loop soap opera.

Personality Psychosynthesis

The goal of psychosynthesis is to achieve “an harmonious inner integration, true Self-realization, and right relationships with others” (Assagioli, 1965, p. 21). The steps in this process were originally these:
Self as Phoenix

1. Thorough knowledge of one's personality (including classic analysis)
2. Control of its various elements (harmonization of physical, emotional, mental components, as well as subpersonalities)
3. Realization of one's true Self—the discovery or creation of a unifying center
4. Psychosynthesis: the formation or reconstruction of the personality around the new center

Later he was to add a fifth point: the synthesis of the integrated personality with the Transpersonal Self. This was to be undertaken by those psychologically mature individuals who had successfully completed personality integration, although, in actuality, this process is known to begin spontaneously before that integration is fully completed.

In reality, the process has been found to be far less straightforward, more a meandering path than a straight march. Upward progress necessarily includes further realization of the disowned and underdeveloped aspects of ourselves, which then must be further integrated. Often the strength and courage to face the dark and hidden within is gained through glimpses or brief moments of self-realization. The psychosynthesis therapist is guided by the inner wisdom of the client, revealed through dreamwork, guided imagery, and presenting issues, and must be keenly aware of where the working energy lies.

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>PSYCHOSYNTHESIS: STAGES OF GROWTH</th>
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<td>(Compared to TPD)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stage of Pre-Integration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness of self—and what drives us—much horizontal inner conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Dabrowski's Theory, this covers Level I (Self-centered existence) and Level II (Ambivalence)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stage of Personality Integration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lengthy process of disidentification from parts and harmonious synthesis of all components around a deeper center, the self</td>
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<tr>
<td>No comparable stage in Dabrowski's Theory, although partial integrations are possible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level III (War between higher and lower values) and lower Level IV (Progress toward self-actualization)</td>
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<th>Stage of Progress Toward Self-Realization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moving beyond self-actualization toward synthesis of an even greater whole and integration with the Higher Self—toward Dabrowski's Level V</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level IV (Self-actualization)</td>
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<td>Some Level III dynamics operative</td>
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If we compare psychosynthesis to the Theory of Positive Disintegration, we see these developmental stages: A combination of both Level I and Level II of TPD is contained in what we may call the Stage of Pre-Integration in psychosynthesis. This is the psychological stage of most of humanity, caught up in internal conflict, with selfhood usurped by subpersonalities, pushed hither and yon by drives, desires, urges and inclinations, strangely ambivalent or unaware. This is for humanity the broad field of garnered experience.

The next stage, which has no real equivalent in TPD, is the Stage of Personality Integration. This is a bio-psychological integration among our physical, emotional, and mental parts, an achievement of coordination and balance wherein all personality components are able to work together to achieve chosen goals. Personality Integration covers a wide spectrum of integrative work, as one might well imagine, remembering all that needs to be resolved and integrated from the first stage. Such a synthesis is hard won because it often means doing the most difficult thing. For the emotionally polarized it means mental evaluation of emotional states. For the mentally polarized it means learning to value and express feelings. For the highly intellectual, it may mean recovering a sense of the body and moving into action. The work of disidentification is at the heart of this work of personality synthesis.

Because an integrated personality can operate in a coordinated way, with the body, heart and mind in concert, people so integrated are often achievers who rise to positions of note in the world. They are able and creative, but they have as yet no high emotional development. That is yet to come. They may help or harm their environment, and that effect is simply a by-product of their own ambition.

This idea that we move toward greater integration before facing the stresses of spiritual synthesis is in contrast to Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, which sees integration at its lowest and highest levels, and does not recognize an intermediate integration. Dabrowski did describe a process of partial integration, which he saw occurring whenever a moral choice was consciously made and carried out. Still, it is difficult to reconcile these two points of view with regard to early integration.

Transpersonal Psychosynthesis

We might call the next stage in the psychosynthesis process The Stage of Progress Toward Self-Realization. It roughly corresponds to TPD's Level IV, although it also contains dynamics similar to TPD's Level III. It is interesting that Level III in TPD is called Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration. Assagioli explains that there is a constant exchange of energy between the unconscious and the conscious awareness, and that holds good for superconscious as well as lower unconscious energies. It is quite possible that this "leakage" or intrusion from the Superconscious acts as a floodlight or criterion which sets up disquieting revelations. This could well lead to a

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The differential diagnosis is generally not difficult. The symptoms observed isolately may be identical; but an accurate analysis of their genesis, and a consideration of the patient's personality in its entirety and (most important of all) the recognition of his existential problem, reveal the difference in nature and level of pathogenic conflicts. In the cases we are considering, the conflicts are produced by the new awakening tendencies, aspirations, and interests of a moral, religious or spiritual character... [emphasis added]. In a general way they can be considered as the result of crises in the development, in the growth of the patient's personality (pp. 42-43).

These crises mount in intensity through the stages of the Self-realization process, culminating in "The Dark Night of the Soul," that experience of psychological agony described by many saints and mystics.

Stage 4, "Phases of the Process of Transmutation" is similar in many ways to TPD's Level IV. There is the same steady, long-term work of reshaping the personality in the direction of what is highest in oneself, the same work of self-education, autopsychotherapy, the development of autonomy and authenticity, and the integration around the center of the highest sensed self-being. For Assagioli this was the Transpersonal Self, a reality that has existed all along, often unbeknownst to the personality in its "muddling through" days. For Kazimerz Dabrowski, it was the Personality Ideal, a new center evolved out of the highest moral sense of each individual human being. Yet their recognition of the importance of this higher center is remarkably alike.

Assagioli does not designate a stage comparable to Dabrowski's Level V. His emphasis is more on the interaction, communication, and eventual conscious cooperation between the personality self and the high transpersonal Self. This conscious cooperation can be summed up in two words: "acceptance and love" (Assagioli, 1991, p.114). A person fully aligned with his or her transpersonal Self has attained

...a state of victory and liberation which the eastern philosophers have called Nirvana. Here all desires, all personal yearnings are consumed, every attachment is severed and every fear dissolved. Thus released, the spirit acquires an acute, formidable power: it is capable of wakening action without action, which nothing can resist. (Assagioli, 1991, p.114)

Assagioli makes a strong distinction between the contents of the Superconscious, which are fluid, dynamic, shifting and changing, and the Transpersonal Self, which is stable and unchanging. The exploration of the Superconscious is a vast undertaking, whose exertions, hazards and challenges are not to be minimized. But the energies of the Superconscious affect all of us, on whatever level we happen to be striving. They are a part of actuality, available to all. The Transpersonal Self exists for all, awaiting our ability to contact this tremendous Reality.

Complementarity

Clearly there are differences between psychosynthesis and the Theory of Positive Disintegration. But I feel they are differences of emphasis and point of view, and that the two systems overlap and reinforce each other. Taken together, they comprise a great panorama of possible developmental achievement, mapped out in all its stages, a comprehensive context against which to weigh psychological specifics.

Dabrowski's theory patently provides a superior set of diagnostic tools in the clearly delineated levels and dynamisms, as well as the identifiable overexcitabilities. Psychosynthesis has only a vague diagnostic metaphor: Does this person appear to be at the child, adolescent, or adult phase of human development? (Assagioli, 1991).

Information about the five overexcitabilities is extremely helpful in identifying individuals with strong Developmental Potential. Because these characteristics are observable even in young children, opportunity is provided for the support and encouragement of accelerated development by parents, teachers, therapists and the caring community at large. Especially important is the emphasis upon emotional overexcitability and the stellar role it plays, along with intellectual and imaginative overexcitability, in the attainment of higher levels of development. It is rare to find emotion valued in this way.

Psychosynthesis gives far more insight into selfhood, and the development of self-awareness as a tool for growth. On this basis rests the discovery and harmonization of subpersonality energy, the entire dynamics of identification and disidentification in the long process of becoming autonomous and authentic.

It must be said that the Theory of Positive Disintegration does contain a similar but less emphasized idea. Dabrowski noted that one nears Level III
before reflection and the ability to observe oneself as an object (and therefore the ability to be a true subject) is fully developed. Subject-Object-in-Oneself, as this capacity is called, is an important dynamism which is instrumental in perceiving and guiding the self-transformational work to be done.

The psychosynthesis idea that there is a self-Self continuum, and the relationship implied, explains and illuminates many of the phenomena of TPD. For instance, the overexcitabilities themselves may well be the result of downpouring superconscious energy which flows through the self-Self alignment into those individuals who have developed the sensitivity to be receptive. Such alignment and rapport between personal self and the higher Self are the subject of a posthumous collection of Assagioli’s writings (Assagioli, 1991). Higher energies may be invited but may not be easy to integrate. This would fit with the Level III experience of pressure cooker intensity of energies demanding expression, hard to contain and harder still to integrate. Possibly not until Level IV does an individual gain enough experience and enough sense of self to be able to handle these energies, so that they are more harmoniously and effectively put to chosen use.

Insistence upon the importance of the will and its intimate connection with the self provides both the understanding and the means by which movement toward autonomy is fostered. Assagioli’s full analysis and detailed description of the will, its stages and characteristics, provide good tools for developmental upward mobility (Assagioli, 1973). When self is realized to be who we really are then intention, discerning choice, and willing action in tune with self provide a natural forward momentum.

Psychosynthesis has a rich storehouse of information about effective means of helping clients move forward toward their full potential. TPD, in contrast, focuses on structure rather than on therapy. A wide assortment of therapeutic techniques is available to the psychosynthesis therapist (who works in cooperation and intuitive rapport with the self of the client). Such techniques are eclectic, including the fields of Jungian analysis and gestalt therapy, focusing, guided imagery, artwork, movement, sensory enrichment, role playing, dreamwork, dialogue with the transpersonal Self, subpersonality work, as well as the basic examination of interpersonal relationships. Psychosynthesis is especially helpful where transpersonal experiences occur. These extraordinary states of consciousness it values and understands.

The structure of the Theory of Positive Disintegration, combined with the tools of psychosynthesis, together provide a powerful potential for providing the understanding and the help needed by those undergoing the disintegrative process.

Summary

This article has outlined, in a general manner, some of the more obvious connections between the developmental theories of Assagioli and Dabrowski. Intensive research and investigation should disclose many more ramifications and areas of mutual clarification as well as questions arising to be resolved. Such cross-analysis cries out to be done. Only imagine what the psychotherapy of the future might be, based on the insight, compassion, and daring of these two theorists, Dabrowski and Assagioli, who saw in such broad vistas and with such accuracy! Even more importantly, these theories remove the ceiling from the growth process and recognize as legitimate the integration of Superconscious energies. They lift our sights upward and urge us all to become our highest possible selves.

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Becoming Self through Suffering: The Irenaean Theodicy and Advanced Development

Frank Gruba-McCallister

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ABSTRACT: Both the theories of Dabrowski and Assagioli view the highest level of personal development as the attainment of self or spirit. In this respect, they describe a state very similar to the unitive and transcendent experience described by mystics. However, the process of attaining this state is painful and arduous. The role of suffering in the attainment of transcendence is affirmed by both Dabrowski and Assagioli, as well as many others. The way in which suffering promotes advanced development is discussed. The views of Dabrowski and Assagioli are related to the Irenaean theodicy which sees suffering as essential to our spiritualization.

Introduction

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of higher states of consciousness and their relevance to our understanding of human potential. Abraham Maslow (1971) pioneered this work in his study of peak experience and spoke of the need to define health based on the highest level of functioning of which we are capable. In some ways, the noted American psychologist, William James (1958), anticipated this in his classic study, The Varieties of Religious Experience, where he noted the relevance of such experiences to psychological well-being. This is an observation that has since been reiterated by many other writers (Assagioli, 1965; Bucke, 1901/1923; Jung, 1936; Watts, 1972; Wilber, 1977).

Following this insight, the mystical state, as the highest level of consciousness, represents the true goal toward which human development is directed. An excellent discussion of this position is provided by Ken Wilber...