

DABROWSKI (Theory of Positive Disintegration)

While searching for a deeper understanding of the issues of concern to him, Dr. Dabrowski found certain individuals increasingly repugnant to him. These individuals were superficial, vulgar, had an absence of inner conflict, and were capable of quickly forgetting grave experiences.

He searched for, and found, individuals who were authentically ideal, who held unchangeable values, and who struggled to be 'what they could be', not satisfied with 'what they were'.

He could not accept the one-sided and uni-level transposition of experimental results with animals by behaviorists onto complex, subtle and multilevel human behaviors.

Nor could he accept the psychoanalytic explanation that early childhood frustrations accounted for the origin and development of psychoneuroses when his own observations and his clinical practice daily demonstrated the link between psychoneurotic and creative processes.

He could not accept social theories which associated human development with external influences only.

He felt the need to elaborate his own ideas. Individuals, in his observations, fall naturally into three groups:

- 1) primitive and brutal individuals, acting always to their own advantage.
- 2) seemingly "normal" individuals, generally submissive and subordinated to such individuals as could be found in group 1.
- 3) nervous individuals characterized by enhanced psychic excitability, and who create the highest and most lasting values.

Developmentally, the first group showed the greatest aggressiveness and fewest morals, also the fewest signs of development. The second group, although they showed weak signs of development, were handicapped in that they fell under the influence of the first group. The third group were developmentally the richest of the three, but were being squeezed to the edges by the other two.

Dr. Dabrowski claimed these three groupings could be found everywhere - in the family, the school, administration, industry, higher education, even internationally, between leaders of countries.

In the multilevelness (many levels) of human functioning, higher levels control lower levels (within the individual) through inhibition. Reflection, hesitation and inhibition are less automatic than an immediate response to stimuli. Between individuals, those with greater aggression and fewer morals (fewer conscious reflections, hesitations and inhibitions) will try to control those with less aggressiveness and greater morals.

Dr. Dabrowski has delineated five levels of development, as follows:

- 1) Primitive integration - where intelligence is in the service of self-preservation, and the self is the center of the universe. Persons at this level lack morals, are egocentric and selfish, abuse themselves towards those who are stronger, and ill-treat those they see as weaker, and see all conflict as 'caused by somebody else'.
- 2) Unilevel disintegration - the primitive structure has broken and is followed by a disintegrative state in which the individual experiences much ambivalence as all things (and people) seem equally important (or unimportant). Persons at this level of development display excessive moodiness, and many conflicting 'wills' and desires.
- 3) Spontaneous multilevel disintegration - a hierarchy of values begins to emerge, at first spontaneously, manifesting in the individual as depth. Persons at this level of development experience astonishment in relation to their own behavior, discontent and shame and guilt in regard to some behaviors, which they consciously try to inhibit, feelings of inferiority towards themselves (that is, they now measure themselves in terms of what are they capable of, instead of, how do they compare to someone else), sometimes take conscious stands against something in their environment with which they disagree, but in a manner which is termed positive maladjustment, for there is nothing negative and childish about the way they express their dissatisfaction, and, finally, show signs of creativity as they constructively express their over-reactivity, or overexcitability in response to the human condition.
- 4) Directed multilevel disintegration - the hierarchy of values is now retained and maintained consciously by the individual, permitting few lapses back to lower levels of functioning. Persons at this level are capable of great empathy, self-awareness and self-control, of self-education and autopsychotherapy. Their personality ideal (what they plan to make of themselves as a human) is consciously activated.
- 5) Secondary integration (extremely rare) - an individual at this level, now experiencing a reduction of the developmental tension, gives, at the same time, the appearance of great power and great peace. He is autonomous (self-directed), authentic (honest and sincere), responsible, and capable of universal empathy (my family the world).

Though experienced as negative, by the person undergoing the transition, the disintegration necessary when one 'leaves' a former functioning level of ~~level~~ of development is positive, claims the author. What is or can be positive about disintegration, when one exists in a sea of uncertainty, confused not only about previous values, but also about present and future ones?

The disintegrative aspect itself is what is positive, the fact that an older, lower level of being, of relating, of functioning in the world has broken down and given way to a higher, more conscious way of being in the world. The current 'dis-ease' with oneself gives way to a higher, a more stable, more inclusive integration.

There are ³ factors in development, claims Dr. Dabrowski. The first factor consists of the innate constitutional characteristics and potentialities of the organism. The second factor consists of all the environmental influences and pressures which come from other persons individually or in social groups. The third factor consists of those autonomous processes which a person brings into his own development, such as self-awareness, inner conflict, etc. When the autonomous processes appear, self-determination becomes possible, but not before. Because of this, man has the possibility of transcending (rising above) his constitutional and environmental limitations.

It is the third factor which sets Dabrowski apart from other theorists. Developmental potential in an individual can be limited to the first factor, a combination of the first and second factor, or the third factor.

If the first factor, we are dealing with ⁴psychopathic, totally egocentric individual, incapable of reflection on his actions, one who blames others or external forces for all his problems, and uses others as objects to satisfy his own desires.

If a combination of the first and second factors we find an individual in the grips of social opinion and his own psychological makeup, one who cannot conceive of himself changing ("I was born that way").

If the third factor, all three factors may come into play in the individual. If this is the case, the third factor (autonomous, conscious forces) will be in conflict with the first and second factors. The individual will create his higher self in opposition to his lower self. (a case of "over my dead body", psychologically speaking)