CASIMIR DABROWSKI'S THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION
AND THE AMERICAN HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

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The American Humanistic psychologists became acquainted with the theory of positive disintegration relatively late, perhaps too late to be influenced by Dabrowski's thinking, and vice versa. Dabrowski was "discovered" and introduced to American readers of psychology by O. Hobart Mowrer. In his introduction to Dabrowski's book "Personality-Shaping Through Positive Disintegration (1967) Mowrer states: "Dr. Dabrowski's name and work first came to my attention in the form of a monograph entitled Psychological Basis of Self-Mutilation which was published in 1937. But it was to be exactly a quarter of a century until I met the man himself. This came about in the following way: Early in 1962 I received a letter from Dr. Dabrowski indicating that he contemplated a trip to this country and would plan to visit the University of Illinois. From a knowledge of my writings he said he thought we perhaps shared some very similar views concerning the nature and correction of psychopathology, which he would like to discuss" (Mowrer, 1967, XIII). Earlier in the same introduction Mowrer states: "Not only is Dabrowski's conception of psychopathology highly unconventional and thus not likely to be grasped in its true light, but it is also couched in a somewhat technical language which the author, over the years, has evolved for his own purposes; it takes a little while for the uninitiated to make the necessary 'translation' into more familiar terms and thought forms" (Mowrer, 1967, XII). Mowrer, who is to a degree outside the mainstream of the American
Humanistic psychology, was attracted by Dabrowski's theory because of the latter's concern with the moral problem of guilt and responsibility. As has been pointed out by Mowrer, American psychologists may encounter some difficulties in reading Dabrowski's works. These difficulties arise not only from differences in terminology but also from a somewhat different philosophical orientation. The present paper addresses itself to this problem.

The historical roots and antecedents of Dabrowski's theory of "positive disintegration" are somewhat different from those of the American Humanistic ("Third Force") Psychology. The former has developed in the intellectual climate of Continental Europe. Its origins are in the French school of dynamic psychiatry of Pierre Janet and his followers, in Hughlings Jackson's theory of hierarchy of the nervous system functions, in the clinical teachings of Wilhelm Stekel, and in the theory of child development of Eduard Claparede. The American Humanistic Psychology is a product of the American soil. The theory of positive disintegration has arisen in the clinical context of psychotherapy mainly with juveniles, outside the academic forum where the debates concerning theories of personality are conducted on the North American continent. The theory also has evolved outside the tradition of experimental psychology, with its stress on the importance of scientific methodology, which on this continent has dominated the field of personality theory and research. Another factor is the influence of the Existentialist philosophy and of the German philosophical idealism on Dabrowski's thinking. Until recently these philosophical currents were an unknown tradition in America.
Similarly, to many Continental Europeans, who witnessed two devastating world wars followed by social upheaval and individual suffering, Dabrowski is more pessimistic with regard to the human fate than his American counterparts. Along with the Existentialists, Dabrowski puts a greater stress on the dignity of man rather than on his happiness.

These accidents of history have produced differences in conceptualization, with resulting difficulties in communication between the followers of Dabrowski and the representatives of the mainstream of the American Humanistic psychology. The terms used to define similar concepts are different. There is also less emphasis in Dabrowski's theory on the overall logical coherence of the conceptual structure than is the case with more academically inclined American theorists. Nevertheless there is a basic convergence between the views of Dabrowski and those of the Americans. Both the positive disintegration theory and the Humanistic psychology reject reductionism which characterizes Behaviourism and the orthodox Freudianism. Both endeavour to explain complex human behaviour, such as artistic creativity or religious experience, on its own level. Such an explanation may require the postulation of new principles, new laws, and the development of new research methods. Both Dabrowski and the Humanistic psychologists subscribe to a concept of man which is different from that of the behaviourists and, to a lesser extent, from that of the orthodox psychoanalysts. Allport (1955) distinguishes two traditional views on the nature of man. The first is the "Lockean" view, which assumes that human mind is a tabula rasa, on which the impressions coming from the physical and social milieu are imprinted. Man is regarded as basically passive and as only reacting to external forces. He is
molded by the external environment to which he becomes adapted by social learning. This view stresses the average man, stresses adjustment, and tends to regard behavior as being determined by past conditioning and learning. Allport calls the second view of human nature "Leibnitzian". According to this view, man is an active agent, initiating actions, and not merely a passive object reacting to environmental forces. He is the source of purposive acts which actualize his potential. Consequently, man's behaviour is not entirely determined by his past learning, but also by goals and purposes that lie in the future. Thus, human behaviour is self-determined rather than externally determined. This distinction between the "Lockean" and the "Leibnitzian" idea of man is almost identical to that made by Harre and Secord (1972) between a "mechanistic" and an "anthropomorphic" model of man.

Both Dabrowski and the Humanistic psychologists accept the "Leibnitzian" view of man, while Behaviourists subscribe to the "Lockean" one. The Freudian position is somewhere in the middle. According to the latter position human behaviour is shaped by internal biological forces which produce certain primitive urges and drives in the id. It is also shaped by external social forces which check and modify these primitive drives. The higher regions of mind, the ego and consciousness, tend to be passive and are reacting only both to the organismic forces emanating from the id and to the external forces emanating from the social environment. The resulting behaviour is a product of a compromise between these two kinds of forces. The Freudian model, therefore, has both the "Lockean" and the "Leibnitzian" features. The id and the unconscious are "Leibnitzian", while consciousness and the ego are "Lockean" in character.
Two other diametrically opposing views of man are those of Hobbes and Rousseau. According to the Hobbesian view the natural man is intrinsically bad, animal-like. He becomes civilized and humanized only by society. Accordingly, the society is the source of the higher levels of human behaviour, the source of values and morals. In contrast Rousseau, and before him Locke, regarded the natural man as intrinsically good, though corrupted by civilization. According to the Hobbesian view there is a split, a discontinuity, between the natural order and the moral order. The roots of the former are in the physical world and nature, while the roots of the latter lie in the society. Rousseau, however, envisages a continuity between the natural and the moral orders. The latter emerges from the former. Therefore moral values can be discovered in the natural order of the world. The Humanistic psychologists have tended to adopt Rousseau's view of man, while the Freidians and the behaviourists adhere to the Hobbesian one. They maintain that the animal side of man is basically evil and has to be suppressed by the society. Accordingly, only civilized man, a member of a society, is capable of moral feelings, of altruism, and of religious experience. The Humanistic psychologists, on the other hand, believe that the potentiality for these capacities exist in man, as a biological organism, waiting to be actualized. They probably can be only fully realized by a superior man who enjoys perfect mental health, is creative, and who embodies the design for the "good life". Such a life realizes moral and esthetic values, which are the beacons guiding the personality towards its full actualization. Moral and esthetic values, which are at the bottom identical with one another, exist objectively in the natural order to be discovered empirically.
Thus, the Humanistic psychologists subscribe quite explicitly to the ethical Naturalism. Together with the ancient Stoics, they claim to be able to discover "what ought to be" in "what is". Consequently they reject ethical subjectivism and cultural relativism. Further, they believe that positive mental health is identical with superior morality and the implementation of ethical and esthetic values. One could ask: How values are to be discovered, and how the criteria of positive mental health can be established? The answer of the Humanistic psychologists to this question is clearly spelled out by Maslow (1962) who says that values and the criteria for mental health can be discovered by observing superior, self-actualizing people. Full self-actualization is an ideal approached only by a few. It cannot be defined by averaging human characteristics and by using the "average man" as a norm. Other humanistic psychologists, such as Carl Rogers (1961), have discovered the criteria for mental health and for valuation in the unfolding growth of individual personalities in the course of psychotherapy. The Humanistic psychologists tend to subscribe to an endaimonistic ethics of pursuit of happiness and of personal "good". The self-actualization leads to a state of happiness and well-being. The Humanistic psychologists equate this state with that of positive mental health and contrast it with the state of mental illness. Since mental illness is a negative condition of absence of positive mental health these psychologists are not interested in it. Instead, they are interested in the higher forms, and positive aspects, of human behaviour, such as artistic creativity, mystical experiences, and altruism. They are interested in superior rather than in inferior individuals.

The views of Casimir Dabrowski on self-actualization and realization
of personal values differ in important aspects from the views of American Humanistic psychologists. Dabrowski, similarly to the "Third Force" (Humanistic) psychologists, is a personality growth theorist, who believes that every human being has a propensity for personality development, which aims at attaining higher levels of its integration and functioning. However, Dabrowski is a neo-Jacksonian, and believes in the presence of discontinuous stages of this development. Similarly to Jackson, he maintains that the nervous system, and therefore the human personality, is characterized by a hierarchical organization of the levels of neuronal, or psychological, functional integration. One of these is always actively dominant. Before the dominance shifts there has to be a dissolution of the functions of the lower level, and vice versa from higher to lower levels. Similar views on hierarchical organization of psychic functions were held by Pierre Janet (Ellenberger, 1970) and his student Henri Ey (1969). Janet maintained that human "tendencies" (instincts) were organized in three groups: lower, middle, and higher. These "tendencies" at different levels could come into conflict with one another. Ey has elaborated the theory of Jackson and that of Janet into the organo-dynamic system of psychiatry. He postulates a "dialectic" or "dynamic" process which is instrumental in evolutionary passage from the organic infrastructure to the psychic superstructure. Through the phylogenetic and ontogenetic development of the infrastructure a more complex psychic superstructure is produced which dialectically interacts with and controls the former. The laws governing the organization of the superstructure are different from those of the organization of the infrastructure. The psychic superstructure evolves in the direction of enhancing
its psychological features away from the purely physiological ones. Ey equates the Freudian unconscious and the "automatism psychologique" of Pierre Janet with low and primitive levels of psychological organization. Consciousness represents to him the highest level of psychic integration. Henri Ey along with Henri Baruk and Jean Deley have continued the tradition of the Janet school in the French psychiatry. These authors as well as Pierre Janet and Hughlings Jackson have influenced Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration. His hierarchy of levels of personality integration from lower to higher—the primary integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, organized multilevel disintegration, and secondary integration—assumes a discontinuity of the personality growth (Dabrowski, 1964, 1967). The levels of personality integration which characterize different stages of personality development are qualitatively different, are controlled by different laws, and are guided by distinct sets of values. The discontinuity of stages of personality development in Dabrowski's theory bears an imprint of Jackson's thinking, and of the theorizing of the French school of Janet. The American personality growth theorists assume a smooth and continuous rather than saltatory development. Maslow (1954) is the only American theorist who has proposed a theory of motivation based on a hierarchy of needs. The lower needs are deficiency needs. They are aroused only as long as they are not satisfied, after which they become quiescent. The lowest in the hierarchy are physiological deficiency needs, such as hunger and thirst. Higher in the hierarchy come psychological deficiency needs such as the ones for safety and security; still higher come the needs for love and belongingness, and the needs for esteem by others and for self-esteem.
At the top of the need hierarchy are growth needs, such as needs for knowledge, beauty and creativity. The highest need is the need for self-actualization. The growth needs become active only after the deficiency needs are satisfied. The latter are associated with "coping" behaviour while the former with "expressive" behaviour. However, Maslow's hierarchy of needs does not presuppose different levels of personality integration associated with qualitatively different stages of its development. Dabrowski's views on this subject differ. According to him an individual at the unilevel stage of personality disintegration is in an important respect a different person from the same individual at the organized multilevel stage of disintegration. At the unilevel stage the individual is passively actualizing his growth potential which is determined by his hereditary endowment and the influences of his social milieu. In contrast, at the organized multilevel stage the "third factor" is dominant, and the individual directs his own development by intentional "free choices". He actively shapes his destiny. Using the Sartrean terminology, one could say that at the unilevel stage of personality disintegration "essence precedes existence", while at the organized multilevel stage "existence precedes essence". This distinction also differentiates the views on self-actualization espoused by the American Humanistic psychologists from those of the Existentialists. According to the former the personality growth potential, if the environmental conditions are favourable, "actualizes itself", in the way an acorn in a fertile soil "actualizes" itself into becoming an oak tree. This view implies the Aristotelian concept of entelechy, a potency to develop the specific essence. On the other hand, according to the Existentialists,
man creates his own personality and his values by free choices, by acts of "free will". According to the first view "essence precedes existence", according to the second, "existence precedes essence". Maslow, in a chapter devoted to "What psychology can learn from existentialists" in his book *Towards a Psychology of Being* (1962, p. 12), spells out quite explicitly the difference between his views on self-actualization and those of the Existentialists. He states:

The Europeans are stressing the self-making of the self in a way that the Americans don't. Both the Freudians and the self actualization and growth theorists [italics mine] in this country talk more about discovering the self (as if it were there waiting to be found) and of uncovering therapy (shovel away the top layers and you'll see what has been always lying there, hidden). To say, however, that the self is a project and is altogether created by the continual choices of the person himself is an extreme overstatement [italics mine] in view of what we know of, e.g., the constitutional and genetic determinants of personality. This clash of opinions is a problem that can be settled experimentally.

Dabrowski's views on self-actualization provide a compromise between the views of the American Humanistic psychologists and those of the Existentialists. To repeat, he maintains that at lower levels of its development personality self-actualization is determined by the inherited endowment, the growth potential, and by the social milieu. However, at higher levels the "third factor" takes over and the individual shapes his own development by intentional acts and free
choices.

There is another important distinction between the theory of positive disintegration and the American Humanistic psychology. They differ in their views on the nature and purpose of human existence, on the human fate, and on the meaning of human suffering. The ethical system advocated by Humanistic psychologists, and implied in their concept of positive mental health is eudaimonistic. It considers mental health, and by implication morality, as being based on the quest for happiness and personal "good". This is in contrast to ethics based on the quest for "right", dignity, and fulfillment of one's duty. Eudaimonia, the term coined by Aristotle in his Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics, means self fulfillment, fulfillment of one's functions, associated with a state of happiness. Eudaimonistic ethics is of course not to be equated with Hedonistic ethics based on the pursuit of pleasure. Nevertheless, it advocates the pursuit of one's happiness and well being. The meaning of human happiness is an important point of disagreement between the views of the Humanistic psychologists on the one hand, and the theory of positive disintegration and the views of the Existentialists on the other. There is a kind of "Pollyanish" optimism about the goodness of human nature and of the world, regarded as the best of all possible worlds, in the writings of the American Humanistic psychologists, which stems from the Rousseauan model of man adopted by them. To quote Maslow again:

I don't think we need take too seriously the European existentialists' exclusive harping on dread, on anguish, on despair and the like, for which their only remedy seems to be to keep
a stiff upper lip. This high I.Q. [sic] whimpering on a cosmic scale occurs whenever an external source of values fails to work. They should have learned from the psychotherapists that the loss of illusions and the discovery of identity, though painful at first, can be ultimately exhilarating and strengthening. (Maslow, 1962, p. 15)

This optimism is not shared by Dabrowski and the Existentialists. An illustration of this emphasis on happiness and well-being may be taken from Maslow's theory of motivation. Maslow (1954) divides human motives into those of deficit, e.g., hunger and thirst, and those of growth the most important of which is self-actualization. He maintains that the motives of deficit have to be satisfied before the individual can start self-actualizing. This is contrary to the views of Existentialists such as Frankl (1963). The latter found his personal meaning of life while he was in a state of extreme physical deprivation in a concentration camp. The same applies to an artist, who creates great works of art while starving in a garret. The philosophical writings of Soren Kierkegaard are permeated with the ethos of gloom, misery and suffering. This point has also been stressed by Dabrowski in his theory of positive disintegration. He maintains that higher and new personal values are forged through suffering and a disintegration of the previous satisfactory personality adjustment at a lower level. The personality growth is a painful process. It is commonly described as psychoneurosis. However, it is also a creative process, causing suffering, but at the same time leading to higher levels of personal development. In addition, it is conducive to literary, artistic and philosophical creativity, as
illustrated by such authors as Dostoevski, Kafka and Proust, such painters as Van Gogh and Toulouse Lautrec, and such philosophers as Descartes and Kierkegaard. Thus, for Dabrowski, psychoneurosis, mental illness, and suffering have a positive aspect. They have a potential for realization of good. Mental health and mental illness are closely intertwined, being two facets of the creative personality growth. For the American Humanistic psychologists mental illness and mental health are poles apart. They are two opposite ends of a continuum stretching from the extreme ill health, a negative and undesirable state of affairs, to the perfect health, a positive and desirable state of affairs. According to these psychologists mental illness is an absence of mental health, and therefore it is lacking in an independent reality. The Humanistic psychologists are preoccupied with positive mental health and with the psychologically superior. They study outstanding and gifted people, who display creativity and superior mental health, rather than people who are pathological, sick, and inferior. Both the theory of positive disintegration and Humanistic psychology see the problem of mental health as related to that of morality and ethics, and by a further implication to the metaphysics of good and evil. A superior mental health, or a high level of personality development is associated with more refined morality and ethics. It is associated with the realization of good and abatement of evil. However, the theodicy, the role of evil and suffering, implied by the theory of positive disintegration is different from that implied by the theorizing of the Humanistic psychologists. The latter regard suffering and mental illness as indicating an absence of positive mental health,
as having no intrinsic meaning, and, therefore, as being somewhat unreal. Their theodicy is similar to the one adhered to by the Christian Scientists, who regard illness and suffering as an illusion, having no real basis. A weaker form of this theodicy, which follows St. Augustin, regards evil as only a "privation" of good.

The theodicy implied by Dabrowski's theory is of the Irenaean type. According to this theodicy man is imperfect, but perfectible. The world is a place of "soul-making", of trial and tribulation, where the higher potentialities of human personality could develop, leading to an attainment of a degree of freedom and autonomy. There is a purpose and meaning in suffering and pain; they are conducive to the creation of heroic human virtues. Suffering and pain provide occasions for moral choices and evoke such qualities as fortitude, courage, honesty, and loyalty. Thus, according to this view, there is an intrinsic meaning in suffering and evil. They have a potential for good. Both Dabrowski and the Existentialists imply in their writings this type of theodicy.
References


Footnotes

1 Theodicy is a branch of theology which deals with the question of: why the omnipotent and infinitely benign God tolerates the existence of evil and suffering. If He cannot prevent it He is not omnipotent. On the other hand, if He does not want to prevent it He is not infinitely benign. This question has given rise to many theological disputes and speculations about the nature, purpose and metaphysics of evil.

2 The Irenaean type of theodicy takes its name after St. Irenaeus (c. 120-202 A.D.), one of the Greek speaking fathers of the church. This type is different from the theodicy of St. Augustin (354-450 A.D.) who regarded evil as only a privation of good. The latter developed his theodicy as rebuttal of the Manichaean heresy, which postulated a dualism of equally powerful forces of good and evil struggling against each other. In formulating his theodicy St. Augustin was influenced by the views of Plotinus on the nature of evil.