

# **Dąbrowski: The dynamics of concepts**

## **Introduction: The dynamics of concepts**

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## **Introduction: The dynamics of concepts.**

### ***Concepts***

Dąbrowski presented a theory of personality development rich in new concepts. Not only did Dąbrowski present new concepts but he called for a new way to look at concepts altogether. Dąbrowski realized that traditional conceptual descriptions of psychological phenomena could not adequately capture a developmental and multilevel perspective. Psychological attributes that vary widely with development and across levels require flexible and “dynamic” concepts that can adequately describe these differences.

It is helpful to have a brief general orientation to concepts before we look at the novel approach that Dąbrowski proposed.

One major application of concepts considers how human beings use concepts psychologically. Machery (2009) describes this approach:

The properties of concepts explain how people categorize, reason inductively, draw analogies, or understand sentences. The properties of Jamie’s concept of dog explain why she categorizes dogs the way she does, why she draws analogies about dogs the way she does, and so on. Similarly, the general properties of concepts explain the properties that the higher cognitive competences possess, whatever concept is involved. The general properties of concepts explain the properties of our categorization decisions, whether we

categorize something as a dog, as a table, as water, or as a birthday party. (p. 20).

This context of concepts has received considerable attention in the psychological literature (Machery, 2009, 2007; Özdemir and Clark, 2007; Szostak, 2011). Although several approaches to the theory of concepts have been proposed, there appears to be no general consensus in psychology in terms of a preferred theory (Machery, 2009). Machery (2009) offers a comprehensive treatment of the topic and pessimistically concludes that psychology should avoid using concepts altogether. This controversial conclusion is fully explored in Machery (2010) and the discussion that follows.

### ***Concepts in psychological research***

Concepts as constructs describing psychological variables are the cornerstone of psychological theory building and research. Concepts are largely metaphorical descriptions of the phenomenon under consideration. In this context it is critical that constructs represent an accurate and valid description of reality. Thus, construct validity is a critical aspect of using concepts in psychology.

### ***Construct validity***

The idea of construct validity has been fundamental in psychology since its introduction in 1955 by Cronbach and Meehl. Construct validity is commonly misunderstood as an indication of the relative validity of a test or questionnaire. In reality, construct validity is an indicator of the clarity and appropriateness of a given concept.

Cronbach and Meehl (1955), explain:

A construct is some postulated attribute of people, assumed to be reflected in test performance. In test validation the attribute about which we make statements in interpreting a test is a construct. We expect a person at any time to possess or not possess a qualitative attribute (amnesia) or structure, or to possess some degree of a quantitative attribute (cheerfulness). A construct has certain associated meanings carried in statements of this general character: Persons who possess this attribute will, in situation X, act in manner Y (with a stated probability). (pp. 283-284)

Cronbach and Meehl (1955) go on:

To specify the interpretation, the writer must state what construct he has in mind, and what meaning he gives to that construct. For a construct which has a

short history and has built up few connotations, it will be fairly easy to indicate the presumed properties of the construct, i.e., the nomologicals in which it appears. For a construct with a longer history, a summary of properties and references to previous theoretical discussions may be appropriate. It is especially critical to distinguish proposed interpretations from other meanings previously given the same construct. The validator faces no small task; he must somehow communicate a theory to his reader. (p. 297)

Discussion of construct validity continues in the psychological literature today. “The ‘construct’ has become psychology’s unit of analysis and construct validation its *modus operandi*” (Slaney, 2012, p. 291). Slaney (2012) elaborates that in construct validity, it is not the test that is under scrutiny, it is the trait or quality underlying the test that is of critical importance. She quotes the 1954 “Technical Recommendations” paper of the American Psychological Association: “in construct validity it is ‘the trait or quality *underlying the test* [emphasis added] that is of central importance, rather than either the test behavior or the scores on the criteria” (Slaney, 2012, p. 292).

“The theory underlying both the test and the construct may be conceived as an ‘interlocking system of laws’ which is known as a ‘nomological network” (Slaney, 2012, p. 292). “This network gives constructs whatever meaning they have at a given stage of science (Slaney, 2012, p. 293).

There is a wide latitude of approaches when it comes to constructs. “One easily and often comes across references to constructs being ‘unobservable attributes,’ ‘latent traits,’ or other entities or processes which are hypothesized to ‘underlie,’ ‘mediate,’ ‘account for,’ and ‘explain’ observable behaviors” (Slaney, 2012, p. 293).

### ***Concepts as descriptive metaphors***

In its original usage, a metaphor referred to the act of giving something a name that refers to something else. For example, “he had the eyes of a hawk.” In this case, the speaker is drawing an inference that the acuity of the individual’s vision is equivalent to that of a hawk. In the same way, psychologists use concepts to refer to psychological structures. For example, we refer to “levels of personality” and we understand this to be a conceptual metaphor and not intended to describe some actual physical structure within the brain. Various concepts (for example, structures, levels, drives, centers, etc.) act as heuristic devices to help us imagine how a given phenomenon, in this case personality, operates and develops. In our concepts, we are striving to accurately describe and portray an internal mental state or process and thus achieve construct validity: we want our theory and concepts to accurately portray and capture the characteristics of the phenomena we are describing.

“Theories, and the concepts and metaphors that they may contain are essentially the researchers instruments or tools with which he or she relates to the given object(s) in reality that is (are) under study” (Zittoun, Gillespie, Cornish, and Psaltis, 2007).

Reflecting the approach to construct validity above, the concepts and metaphors we choose have to be appropriate to convey our theory and intended meaning. This posed a significant problem for Dąbrowski as he saw that the phenomena he was trying to describe were not static, rather, these phenomena often were highly dynamic and changed dramatically over time and with development. As well, the static and unilevel concepts commonly used in psychology were unable to capture the complexity and dynamic nature of phenomenon when dimensions and levels of development were considered. The same phenomenon seen at different levels of development often demands quite different descriptions, necessitating Dąbrowski to create new and richer concepts to accurately capture the “changeability of concepts.”

***In Dąbrowski's words:***

Dąbrowski (1973) stated:

The terminology of contemporary psychology is extremely complicated and confusing. It is notorious that one and the same term refers to distinctly different phenomena, while phenomena of the same kind are referred to by different terms. Hence the need, even the necessity of a revision of many crucial concepts, of new distinctions and of an examination of concepts from a dynamic, developmental point of view; that is to say, from the viewpoint which will acknowledge fundamental transformations of the content of mental processes and related concepts. . . . Such a dynamic point of view is characteristic of positive disintegration and also of some semantic studies. Contrary to the tendencies to precision and reductionism of the many meanings of a given concept to just one meaning, this new point of view represents the tendency to disintegrate and even break up many concepts into a number of clearly differentiated concepts. It is due to the need to find an adequate new conceptual expression for new insights into reality which cannot be adequately expressed by means of former concepts and distinctions. This process of disintegration of concepts is frequently followed by a later process of an opposite nature which combines and integrates formerly separated conceptual units which are strictly elaborated. Growing knowledge of reality may generate the need to reunite various threads of thought in a secondary integration of concepts at a higher level which expresses new insights. As examples of this secondary integrating process we may mention the concept of higher emotions (attitudes) which combines intellectual, emotional and volitional components, as well as,

existentio-essentialist and empirico-normative compounds discussed in separate chapters of this book. (pp. vii-viii)

“The changeability of concepts and terms depends on the psychic transformation of man and expresses the developmental transformation of human individuals, the growth of their autonomy and authenticity, of their inner psychic milieu and of their growing richness of life experiences” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. viii).

“Our attempts to give a theoretical account of specifically human forces will never succeed if we continue to disregard the dynamic, developmental and multilevel nature of human ontogeny. The distinction of higher and lower instincts, as well as, the distinctions of higher and lower levels within one instinct and its ontogenetic transformations seem to be indispensable to achieve an adequate understanding and theoretical description of mental development” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. xi).

“The growing conceptual complexity and substantial change in the use of concepts is characteristic of every process of growing insight into reality. It is a positive phenomenon which attests to the dynamic and turbulent ‘life’ of concepts” (Dąbrowski, 1973, pp. xi-xii).

“The concept of authenticity raises the same kind of problems. If its use is to be of any value, it is necessary to distinguish authentic existence emanating from autonomous mental development, from the growth and richness of the inner psychic milieu, from positive disintegration and destruction of the lower, primitive mental structure, on the one hand, and, the so-called ‘authentic’ externalization of brutal, thoughtless, elementary drives, on the other hand” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. xiii).

“A ‘dynamization’ of concepts seems to be particularly important in developmental and educational psychology, in the study of interpersonal relations and in psychopathology, especially in the theory of psychoneuroses. The results of this process of dynamization of concepts will more and more express the close association and interconnection of intellectual and emotional functions. The new meanings of concepts should allow a much more incisive analysis of the understanding of oneself, of other individual and human groups” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. xiii).

“Let us restate our view in a brief summary. Many-sided and authentic development of man implies the formation of an adequate system of concepts and terms which would correspond to the new higher stages of this development. Consequently, those concepts which are not adequate at new stages of development must be disintegrated and transformed. New, and richer concepts must be worked out in order to adequately express new cognitive and affective qualities of a growing

personality. Hence, the development of concepts and terms expresses the development of man, particularly his accelerated and autonomic growth. New qualities and new experiences arising in the process of mental development manifest the various symptoms of disintegration through which they become independent, grow in richness, and reveal new creative forms. . . . This process of transformation of concepts and terms in their intellectual and experiential aspects can be called “the drama of the life and development of concepts” (Dąbrowski, 1973, pp. xiv-xv).

### ***Research in general***

It is helpful to put this discussion in the context of a larger, ongoing debate over the fundamental issues related to psychological measurement. Maslow (1966) was disappointed that psychology became obsessed with methodology and significance at the expense of the study of *meaningful* phenomena, an obsession he called methodolatry. Cohen (1994, p. 997) said that null hypothesis significance testing “had not only failed to support the advance of psychology as a science but also has seriously impeded it.” More recently, Borsboom (2005, p. 2) declared that “after a century of theory and research on psychological test scores, for most test scores we still have no idea whether they really measure something, or are no more than relatively arbitrary summations of item responses.” This view was further emphasized by Markus and Borsboom (2011, p. 453): “notwithstanding the fact that common practices in psychology take for granted the idea that psychological attributes are measurable, and in fact are measured by commonly used tests, skepticism about the validity of this assumption has been an undercurrent during the entire history of psychology.”

### ***It's not about how you want it to be***

Lambdin (2012) presented a review of current psychological research, referring to the state of affairs as “statistical shamanism.” In this important article, he quoted Stanislaw Andreski, suggesting that many in the social sciences end up making claims because they *want* their opinions to become reality, not because their claims are based upon corroborated and diverse evidence.

Lambdin (2012) states:

Many social scientists make the claims they do, Andreski states, not because they have corroborated, diverse evidence supporting them as accurate descriptors of reality, but rather because they desire their opinions to *become reality*. This, Andreski argues, is shamanistic, not scientific. (p. 67).

Andreski (1972/1974) a Polish sociologist, makes his case clear:

More than that of his colleagues in the natural sciences, the position of an 'expert' in the study of human behavior resembles that of the sorcerer who can make the crops come up or the rain fall by uttering an incantation. And because the facts with which he deals are seldom verifiable, his customers are able to demand to be told what they like to hear, and will punish the uncooperative soothsayer who insists on saying what they would rather not know—as the princes used to punish the court physicians for failing to cure them. (p. 24)

Andreski (1972/1974) goes on:

[In psychology] significant discoveries are rare, and must remain exceedingly approximate and tentative. Most of the practitioners, however, do not like to admit this and prefer to pretend that they speak with the authority of an exact science, which is not merely theoretical but also applied. (p. 25)

We often see examples of the application of "strict science" to psychology. For example, from the literature on positive psychology, we find the following (some mumbo jumbo is also helpful in presenting such findings):

Fredrickson and Losada, (2005) define flourishing using the positivity/negativity ratio (P/N): the ratio of good thoughts/positive feedback (e.g. "that is a good idea";) vs. negative thoughts/negative feedback (e.g. "this is not what I expected; I am disappointed").

"Mathematically, then, a positivity ratio of about 2.9 bifurcates the complex dynamics of flourishing from the limit cycle of languishing. We call this dividing line the *Losada line*. From a psychological standpoint, this ratio may seem absurdly precise. Yet we underscore that this bifurcation point is a mathematically derived theoretical ideal. Empirical observations made at various levels of measurement precision can test this prediction" (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005, p. 683).

The Losada line establishes the minimum level at which a "complexor" is reached and is equal to a P/N of 2.9013. "Our discovery of the critical 2.9013 positivity ratio may represent a breakthrough" (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005, p. 685).

***In Dąbrowski's words:***

Dąbrowski also commented on the issues of research in psychology. "The present work consists of an attempt to reveal and protect the plasticity and richness, observable in the dynamic transformations of concepts, against the danger of

ossification, unilevelness and sterility arising from a one-sided stress on the requirements of verifiability, precision and statistical elaboration” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. xiii). This presents a logical contradiction to the careful reader. Here, in 1973, Dąbrowski is cautious of over-precision and a unilevel approach to measurement. Yet, the 1977 volumes present a great deal of just such research. Why? In the late 1960’s, the Canada Council made available funding for empirical research projects. Piechowski had come into Dąbrowski’s group from a background in microbiology and believed that he could operationalize much of Dąbrowski’s theory. He worked tirelessly on an extensive research project that culminated in much of the empirical material presented in the 1977 books. From my firsthand understanding from Dąbrowski, he accepted this effort but certainly did not wholeheartedly endorse it.

### ***A comment on positive versus negative***

This review focuses on a positive/developmental emphasis. It should be noted that many of these concepts have positive and negative formulations. For example, the outcome of disintegration can be either positive or negative depending upon several factors, primarily, one's initial level of developmental potential. Authenticity can be positive or negative. Development implies a positive authenticity; an individual's personality ideal will represent higher and nobler human values. On the other hand, an individual at a very low developmental level may "be true to him or herself" and authentically express very low level instincts or egocentric drives. When looking at these concepts it should be remembered that this treatment only considers the developmental or positive aspects.

#### **1). Positive disintegration:**

Positive disintegration is the core concept of the Theory of Positive Disintegration. Dąbrowski believed that normal development is limited by the instinctual heritage carried by humans and by the heavy influence of socialization. He did not feel that inculcation and socialization represented authentic development and he suggested that the early psychological concepts and structures built upon socialization had to be broken apart and dis-integrated in order to allow the individual to create his or her own unique personality.

Dąbrowski observed that a few people in the population, probably about 5%, have difficulty controlling their impulses and instincts and conforming to socialization. These individuals display overt antisocial behavior.

The average person, probably about 60% of the population, becomes socialized and adopts the prevailing mores, roles and expectations of the given culture. Contrary to conventional wisdom in psychology and psychiatry, Dąbrowski did not feel that adjustment to one's culture was a positive feature. Dąbrowski went as far as to say such adjustment represented the opposite of mental health. Likely influenced by philosophy (Plato and Nietzsche) Dąbrowski took the position that authentic development had to reflect a very conscious and volitional examination of one's essential character and the construction of a unique hierarchy of values reflecting one's unique character and personality.

This approach challenges the traditional view of symptoms as negative aspects that must be treated through palliation or resolution. Instead, Dąbrowski said that psychological symptoms, represented by psychoneuroses, were not only positive, but necessary for advanced personality development.

***In Dąbrowski's words:***

"In general, disintegration refers to involution, psychopathology, and retrogression to a lower level of psychic functioning. Integration is the opposite: evolution, psychic health, and adequate adaptation, both within the self and to the environment. Dąbrowski postulates a developmental instinct: that is, a tendency of man to evolve from lower to higher levels of personality" (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. xiv).

"Disintegration of the primitive structures destroys the psychic unity of the individual. As he loses the cohesion which is necessary for feeling a sense of meaning and purpose in life, he is motivated to develop himself. The developmental instinct, then, following disintegration of the existing structure of personality, contributes to reconstruction at a higher level" (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 3).

"The term disintegration is used to refer to a broad range of processes, from emotional disharmony to the complete fragmentation of the personality structure, all of which are usually regarded as negative" (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 5).

"Disintegration is the basis for developmental thrusts upward, the creation of new evolutionary dynamics, and the movement of the personality to a higher level, all of which are manifestations of secondary integration" (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 6).

***Classification of disintegration***

“Disintegration may be classified as unilevel, multilevel, or pathological; and it may be described as partial or global, permanent or temporary, and positive or negative” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 6).

“**Unilevel disintegration** occurs during developmental crises such as puberty or menopause, in periods of difficulty in handling some stressful external event, or under psychological and psychopathological conditions such as nervousness and psychoneurosis. Unilevel disintegration consists of processes on a single structural and emotional level; there is a prevalence of automatic dynamisms with only slight self-consciousness and self-control” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 6).

“Prolongation of unilevel disintegration often leads to reintegration on a lower level, to suicidal tendencies, or to psychosis. Unilevel disintegration is often an initial, feebly differentiated borderline state of multilevel disintegration” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 7).

“In **multilevel disintegration** there is a complication of the unilevel process by the involvement of additional hierarchical levels. There is loosening and fragmentation of the internal environment, as in unilevel disintegration, but here it occurs at both higher and lower strata. These levels are in conflict with one another; their valence is determined by the disposing and directing center, which moves the individual in the direction of his personality ideal. The actions of multilevel disintegration are largely conscious, independent, and influential in determining personality structure” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 8).

**Partial disintegration** involves only one aspect of the psychic structure, that is, a narrow part of the personality. Global disintegration occurs in major life experiences which are shocking; it disturbs the entire psychic structure of an individual and changes the personality. Permanent disintegration is found in severe, chronic diseases, somatic as well as psychic, and in major physical disabilities such as deafness and paraplegia, whereas temporary disintegration occurs in passing periods of mental and somatic disequilibrium. Disintegration is described as positive when it enriches life, enlarges the horizon, and brings forth creativity; it is negative when it either has no developmental effects or causes involution” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 8).

“The prevalence of symptoms of multilevel disintegration over unilevel ones indicates that the disintegration is positive. The presence of consciousness, self-consciousness, and self-control also reveals that the disintegration process is positive. The predominance of the global forms, the seizing of the whole

individuality through the disintegration process, over the narrow, partial disintegration would prove, with other features, its positiveness. Other elements of positive disintegration are the plasticity of the capacity for mental transformation, the presence of creative tendencies, and the absence or weakness of automatic and stereotyped elements” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 19).

“**Partial secondary integrations** occur throughout life as the result of positive resolutions of minor conflicts” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 20).

“As **secondary integration** increases, internal psychic tension decreases, as does movement upward or downward of the disposing and directing center, with the conservation, nevertheless, of ability to react flexibly to danger. The disintegration process, as it takes place positively, transforms itself into an ordered sequence accompanied by an increasing degree of consciousness” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 21).

“Crises are periods of increased insight into oneself, creativity, and personality development” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 18).

“In the normal subject [normal intelligence] disintegration occurs chiefly through the dynamism of the instinct of self-improvement, but in the genius it takes place through the instinct of creativity” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 22).

[The sequence of transformations] “occur only if the developmental forces are sufficiently strong and not impeded by unfavorable external circumstances. This is, however, rarely the case. The number of people who complete the full course of development and attain the level of secondary integration is limited. A vast majority of people either do not break down their primitive integration at all, or after a relatively short period of disintegration, usually experienced at the time of adolescence and early youth, end in a reintegration at the former level or in partial integration of some of the functions at slightly higher levels, without a transformation of the whole mental structure” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 4).

“The term positive disintegration will be applied in general to the process of transition from lower to higher, broader and richer levels of mental functions. This transition requires a restructuring of mental functions” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 18).

“Experiences of shock, stress and trauma, may accelerate development in individuals with innate potential for positive development” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 20).

“In the process of multidimensional disintegration, the individual goes beyond his biopsychological developmental cycle, his animalistic nature, his biological determination and slowly achieves psychological and moral self-determination. The human individual, under these conditions ceases to direct himself exclusively by his innate dynamisms and by environmental influences, but develops autonomous dynamisms such as “subject-object” in oneself, the third factor, or personality ideal” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 60).

“We are human inasmuch as we experience disharmony and dissatisfaction, inherent in the process of disintegration” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 122).

“Positive or developmental disintegration effects a weakening and dissolution of lower level structures and functions, gradual generation and growth of higher levels of mental functions and culminates in personality integration” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 165).

“In the course of evolution from higher animals to man, and from the normal man to the universally and highly developed man, we observe processes of disintegration of lower functions and an integration of higher functions” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 62).

“The developmental process in which occur ‘collisions’ with the environment and with oneself begins as a consequence of the interplay of three factors: developmental potential, . . . an influence of the social milieu, and autonomous (self-determining) factors” Dąbrowski (1972, p 77).

“One also has to keep in mind that a developmental solution to a crisis means not a reintegration but an integration at a higher level of functioning” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 245).

“Inner conflicts often lead to emotional, philosophical and existential crises” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 196).

“There are four stages of positive disintegration forming an invariant sequence: (1) unilevel disintegration, (2) spontaneous multilevel disintegration, (3) organized multilevel disintegration, (4) transition to secondary integration.” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 301).

“The chances of developmental crises and their positive or negative outcomes depend on the character of the developmental potential, on the character of social influence, and on the activity (if present) of the third factor” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 245).

“Every authentic creative process consists of ‘loosening’, ‘splitting’ or ‘smashing’ the former reality. Every mental conflict is associated with disruption and pain; every

step forward in the direction of authentic existence is combined with shocks, sorrows, suffering and distress” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 14).

## **2). Psychoneuroses is not an illness / Neurosis:**

Dąbrowski differentiated neuroses from psychoneuroses. Neuroses are disorders characterized by physiological and psychosomatic processes and, as such, they represent primary or lower level disorders. Psychoneuroses reflect a different, higher type of experience. Psychoneuroses were defined as not only necessary for growth but as a type of growth. Symptoms of psychoneuroses were seen as signs of potential for advanced, and possibly accelerated, development. Psychoneuroses play a critical role in creating the dis-ease—the internal motivation, and the internal conflicts necessary to trigger self-examination and to stimulate the process of development.

### ***In Dąbrowski's words:***

“[psychoneuroses] show symptoms of disharmony and conflicts within the inner psychic milieu and with the external environment. The source of disharmony and conflicts is a favorable hereditary endowment and the ability to accelerate development through positive disintegration towards personality, i.e. towards a cohesive structure of functions at secondary integration. This conception of psychoneuroses does not consider them pathological, but rather as positive forces in mental development” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 176).

“The psychoneurotic problem is one of the lack of adjustment manifesting protest against actual reality, and the need for adjustment to hierarchy of higher values: to adjust to that which “ought to be” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 3).

“Psychoneurotics, rather than being treated as ill, should be considered as individuals most prone to a positive and even accelerated psychic development” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 4).

Psychoneurosis “represents a ‘hierarchy of higher functions,’ which means a hierarchy in which mental dynamisms predominate over nervous reactions. Psychoneurosis is a more psychical or more mental form of functional disorder, while neurosis is a more nervous or somatopsychic form” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 41).

“Nervousness, neuroses, and especially psychoneuroses, bring the nervous system to a state of greater sensitivity. They make a person more susceptible to positive change. The higher psychic structures gradually gain control over the lower ones. The lower psychic structures undergo a refinement in this process of inner

psychic transformation. This transformation is the fruition of the developmental potential which makes these states possible and makes possible further development” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 41).

Neurosis: “Psychophysiological or psychosomatic disorders characterized by a dominance of somatic processes. There are no detectable organic defects, although the functions may be severely affected” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 299).

Psychoneurosis: “A more or less organized form of growth through positive disintegration. Lower psychoneuroses are predominantly psychosomatic in nature, higher psychoneuroses are highly conscious internal struggles whose tensions and frustrations are not anymore translated into somatic disorders” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 303).

“‘Psychoneurotic experiences’ by disturbing the lower levels of values help gradually to enter higher levels of values, i.e. the level of higher emotions. These emotions becoming conscious and ever more strongly experienced begin to direct our behaviour and bring it to a higher level” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 3).

“In psychoneuroses the highest neuropsychic centres are active and provide a decisive source of psychotherapeutic and developmental energies” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 160).

“Nervousness and psychoneuroses are structural conditions of sensitivity within and towards one’s own inner psychic milieu wherein positive development through unilevel and multilevel disintegration finds especially favourable ground” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 159).

“The presence of neurotic or psychoneurotic positive developmental potential guarantees creative development through higher forms of psychoneurotic processes such as internal conflicts, hierarchization, development of autonomous and authentic dynamisms, towards a high level of personality and secondary integration” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 12).

“The higher the functions in psychoneurosis, the more one uncovers elements of personality development in the subject” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 197).

“Psychoneuroses especially those of a higher level—provide an opportunity to ‘take one’s life into one’s own hands.’ They are expressive of a drive for psychic autonomy, especially moral autonomy, through transformation of a more or less primitively integrated structure” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 4).

“Psychoneuroses are observed in people possessing special talents, sensitivity, and creative capacities; they are common among outstanding people” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 2).

“‘Psychoneurotic experiences’ by disturbing the lower levels of values help gradually to enter higher levels of values, i.e. the level of higher emotions” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 3).

“In the higher psychoneuroses we have ‘seeing’ of new things, answers to the meaning of life, a search for the ‘new and other,’ separation into levels . . .” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 199).

“The general basic condition for the genesis and development of neuroses and psychoneuroses is—in our opinion—an increased psychic excitability [overexcitability]” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 46).

“Generally speaking psychoneuroses should be considered a basic constituent of the process of positive disintegration and a developmentally positive group of dynamisms and syndromes, connected with the tension arising from strong developmental conflicts” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 149).

Psychoneuroses: “those processes, syndromes and functions which express inner and external conflicts, and positive maladjustment of an individual in the process of accelerated development” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 151).

Psychoneuroses are “connected with the tension arising from strong developmental conflicts” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 149) and “contain elements of man’s authentic humanization” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 152).

“psychoneuroses “are the protection against serious mental disorders—against psychoses” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 162).

### **3). Multilevelness (Unilevelness, Levels of functions):**

In describing the average development and behavior of individuals, Dąbrowski observed that most psychological reactions tend to be rote, reflexive and lacking any deep sense of consciousness or awareness. This lack of consciousness often leads to a robotic character in an individual’s responses. Dąbrowski called this unilevelness.

A qualitatively different and radical shift in perception marks advanced development. This shift, referred to by Dąbrowski as multilevelness, is characterized by a conscious comparison of, and evaluation of, what is lower versus what is higher.

Eventually, this vertical analysis comes to influence one's reactions and behavior. Dąbrowski believed that if an authentic individual is able to see the higher alternative in comparison to the lower, he or she would choose the higher.

Reality and our perception of reality can be differentiated into a hierarchy of levels.

The reality that each person perceives reflects his or her given level of development.

Psychological functions go through both quantitative and qualitative changes in the course of development.

These changes allow people to differentiate higher, more developed levels from lower, earlier, less developed levels.

The shift from unilevelness to multilevelness represents a fundamental qualitative change in the perception of reality of an individual.

Differentiation of these lower and higher levels constitutes a multilevel view—this is fundamental to Dąbrowski's conception of mental health and of development.

***In Dąbrowski's words:***

“Lower levels of functions are characterized by automatism, impulsiveness, stereotypy, egocentrism, lack or low degree of consciousness. . . . Higher levels of functions show distinct consciousness, inner psychic transformation, autonomousness, creativity” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 297).

“By higher level of psychic development we mean a behavior which is more complex, more conscious and having greater freedom of choice, hence greater opportunity for self-determination” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 70).

Multilevelness: “Division of functions into different levels, for instance, the spinal, subcortical, and cortical levels in the nervous system. Individual perception of many levels of external and internal reality appears at a certain stage of development, here called multilevel disintegration” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 298).

“It appears obvious that the ability to understand and to successfully apply the concept of multilevelness depends upon the development of personality of the individual” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. x).

Unilevelness: “unilevelness;” that is to say, the absence of the dynamisms of hierarchization of oneself into “lower” and “higher,” more and less developed elements which are closer to or distant from one’s personality (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 43).

“In the theory of positive disintegration we distinguish various levels of development of emotional and instinctive functions. The level of these functions determines the level of values. The concept of hierarchy of values is based on the distinction of levels of emotional and instinctive development of individuals as well as social groups. We hold the opinion that it is possible to obtain in valuation a degree of objectivity comparable to that of scientific theories. It is characteristic that, for instance, moral judgments made by individuals representing a very high level of universal mental development display a very high degree of agreement” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 92).

“The qualitative and quantitative differences which appear in mental functions as a result of developmental changes. Lower levels of functions are characterized by automatism, impulsiveness, stereotypy, egocentrism, lack or low degree of consciousness” (Dąbrowski, 1972, pp. 297-298).

“The developmental sequences of positive disintegration are non-ontogenetic. They are measured in terms of levels attained in the course of development which has no distinct time schedule . . . The levels of development are, therefore, a *non-ontogenetic evolutionary scale*” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 23).

“The developmental transformations are characterized by a transition from unilevelness to multilevelness, from ahierarchic to hierarchic structures, from a narrow to a broad understanding of reality, entailing the capacity for reflecting on one’s past history (retrospection) and for envisaging future conflicts with one-self and tasks of one’s personal growth (prospection)” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 26).

### ***Primary Integration***

Primary Integration (Primitive integration, Level I):

Definition: “An integration of all mental functions into a cohesive structure controlled by primitive drives” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 302).

“Individuals with some degree of primitive integration comprise the majority of society” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 4).

“Among normal primitively integrated people, different degrees of cohesion of psychic structure can be distinguished” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 66).

“Psychopathy represents a primitive structure of impulses, integrated at a low level” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 73).

“The first stage, called primitive or primary integration, is characterized by mental structures and functions of a low level; they are automatic and impulsive, determined by primitive, innate drives. At this stage, intelligence neither controls nor transforms basic drives. It is used in a purely, instrumental way, so as to supply the means towards the ends determined by primitive drives” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 21).

“PRIMITIVE INTEGRATION, or primary integration, an integration of mental functions, subordinated to primitive drives (cf.). There is no hierarchy of instincts; their prevalence depends entirely on their momentary greater intensity. Intelligence is used only as a tool, completely subservient to primitive urges, without any transformative role. Interest and adaptation are limited to the satisfaction of primitive desires. There is no inner psychic milieu, no mental transformation of stimuli, no inner conflicts” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 176).

[Comment: In primary integration reactions are based primarily on stimuli and there is little psychological intervention between the stimulus and the response. Responses are based primarily upon instinctual factors and socially ingrained responses. People learn socially appropriate behavior, for example, one learns that when sitting listening to a funeral eulogy, one does not laugh. Let me provide an illustration from a hypothetical movie. I'm sitting in an aisle seat when beside me, in the dark, an older woman stumbles and spills her popcorn. At first several people laugh and, for an instant, I catch myself laughing along. However, I quickly see the situation and inhibit my laughter and get up to help the lady who has fallen. The man in front of me continues to laugh and turns to his partner and says, “look at that clumsy fool.” In primary integration there is no inner psychic milieu to process the stimulus in order to arrive at an appropriate behavioral response. There is no internal mechanism to inhibit lower responses or to replace lower responses with higher ones. By nature, lower responses tend to be instinctual, automatic, socially based and immediate. Higher responses need the intervention of an internal thought process. The stimulus literally must be filtered through one's personality and in this way, the behavioral response will reflect the individual's unique personality ideal.]

“A primitively integrated individual spends his life in the pursuit of satisfying his basic needs. He is controlled by the integrated structure of his instincts, and his intelligence is in their service. He responds to social influence only as a measure of self-preservation. There are no internal conflicts. Mental disorders are characterized by lack of response to social influence, i.e. other individuals are perceived and used as objects” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 111).

***Unilevel disintegration***

“Among the first symptoms of disintegration are increased sensitivity to internal stimuli, vague feelings of disquietude, ambivalences and ambitendencies, various forms of disharmony and, gradually, the appearance of nuclei of hierarchization. This process of hierarchic differentiation applies to both the external stimuli and to one’s own mental structure. At the beginning this hierarchization is very weak. There is a continuous vacillation of ‘pros’ and ‘cons,’ no clear direction ‘up’ or ‘down.’” (Dąbrowski, 1970, pp. 21-22).

“Prolonged states of unilevel disintegration (level II) end either in a reintegration at the former primitive level or in suicidal tendencies, or in a psychosis” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 135).

“protracted and recurrent conflicts between drives and emotional states of a similar developmental level and of the same intensity, e.g. states of ambivalence and ambitendency, propulsion toward and repulsion from the same object, rapidly changing states of joy and sadness, excitement and depression without the tendency towards stabilization within a hierarchy” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 165).

“It [unilevel disintegration] consists of disintegrative processes occurring as if on a single structural level. There is disintegration but no differentiation of levels of emotional or intellectual control. Unilevel disintegration begins with the loosening of the cohesive and rigid structure of primary integration. There is hesitation, doubt, ambivalence, increased sensitivity to internal stimuli, fluctuations of mood, excitations and depressions, vague feelings of disquietude, various forms of mental and psychosomatic disharmony. There is ambitendency of action, either changing from one direction to another, or being unable to decide which course to take and letting the decision fall to chance, or a whim of like or dislike. Thinking has a circular character of argument for argument’s sake. Externality is still quite strong. Nuclei of hierarchization may gradually appear weakly differentiating events in the external milieu and in the internal milieu [inner psychic milieu] but still there is continual vacillation between “pros” and “cons” with no clear direction out of the vicious circle. Internal conflicts are unilevel and often superficial. When they are severe and engage deeper emotional structures the individual often sees himself caught in a “no exit” situation. Severe mental disorders are associated with unilevel developmental structure” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 18).

***Spontaneous multilevel disintegration***

“the time of the appearance of such developmental dynamisms as astonishment with oneself, disquietude with oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself, feelings of shame

and guilt, feeling of inferiority toward oneself. The individual searches not only for novelty, but for something higher; he searches for examples and models in his external environment and in himself. He starts to feel the difference between a higher and a lower level. We can notice the formation of the critical awareness of oneself and other people, awareness of one's 'essence' as it arises from one's existence. Spontaneous multilevel disintegration is the crucial period of positive, developmental transformations" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 22).

"characterized by a relative predominance of spontaneous developmental forces" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 165).

"Internal experiential factors begin to control behavior more and more, wavering is replaced by a growing sense of 'what ought to be' as opposed to 'what is' in one's personality structure. Internal conflicts are numerous and reflect a hierarchical organization of cognitive and emotional life: 'what is' against 'what ought to be' (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 19).

"Spontaneous multilevel disintegration is a crucial period for positive, i.e. developmental transformations. The loosening and disintegration of the inner psychic milieu occurs at higher and lower strata at the same time. This means that the whole personality structure is affected by this process" (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 19).

### ***Organized multilevel disintegration***

"exhibits more tranquility, systematization and conscious transformation of oneself. The developmental dynamisms which distinctly appear at this stage are: "subject-object" in oneself; the third factor, self-awareness and self-control, identification and empathy, education of oneself and autopsychotherapy. The ideal of personality takes more distinct contours and becomes closer to the individuals. There is a pronounced growth of empathy" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 22).

"organized (self-directed), as it is in the period of conscious organization and direction of the processes of disintegration towards secondary integration and personality" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 165).

"While tensions and conflicts are not as strong as at the previous level, autonomy and internal hierarchy of values and aims are much stronger and much more clearly developed. The ideal of personality becomes more distinct and closer. There is a pronounced growth of empathy as one of the dominants of behavior and development" (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 19).

### ***Secondary Integration***

“consists in a new organization and harmonization of personality. The main dynamism active at this stage are: autonomy and authenticity, disposing and directing center on a high level, a subtle highly refined empathy, activation of the personality ideal. The relationship of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ takes on a new dimension. There appears a growing need to transcend the sensory, ‘verifiable’ reality toward the empirical reality which can be attained through intuition, contemplation, and ecstasy rather than through the senses” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 22).

Definition: “the integration of all mental functions into a harmonious structure controlled by higher emotions such as the dynamism of personality ideal, autonomy and authenticity” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 304).

“marks a new organization and harmonization of personality. Disintegrative activities arise only in retrospection. Personality ideal is the dominant dynamism in close union with empathy, and the activation of the ideal. The relationship of “I” and “Thou” takes on the dimension of an absolute relationship on the level of transcendental empiricism” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 19).

#### **4). Developmental potential:**

Dąbrowski described a complex, genetically based, constellation of instincts, dynamisms and other characteristics that he called developmental potential. He believed that strong positive developmental potential could overcome lower (animal) instinctual influences and socialization and contribute to advanced development.

Dąbrowski included several complex and interrelated components in describing developmental potential, including; the three factors of development, dynamisms, psychoneuroses, positive disintegration, emergent, internal features of self (including the hierarchy of values, inner psychic milieu, personality ideal, the disposing and directing center, etc.), and instincts (including the developmental instinct, creative instinct, and the instinct for self-perfection).

Although Dąbrowski identified the third factor as one method to assess developmental potential, no test or measure of this factor has yet been developed and none of the subsequent literature on overexcitability has included the third factor as a component.

Dąbrowski also linked developmental potential with the presence of psychoneuroses, an early and necessary early step in development.

***In Dąbrowski's words:***

The sequence of transformations “occur only if the developmental forces are sufficiently strong and not impeded by unfavorable external circumstances. This is, however, rarely the case. The number of people who complete the full course of development and attain the level of secondary integration is limited. A vast majority of people either do not break down their primitive integration at all, or after a relatively short period of disintegration, usually experienced at the time of adolescence and early youth, end in a reintegration at the former level or in partial integration of some of the functions at slightly higher levels, without a transformation of the whole mental structure” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 4).

“The developmental instinct acts against the automatic, limited, and primitive functional patterns of the biological cycle of life” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 28).

Strong developmental potential causes an individual to rebel “against the common determining factors in his external environment” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 32).

“The individual with a rich developmental potential rebels against the common determining factors in his external environment” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 32).

“If the developmental potential is distinctly positive or negative, the influence of the environment is less important. If the developmental potential does not exhibit any distinct quality, the influence of the environment is important and it may go in either direction. If the developmental potential is weak or difficult to specify, the influence of the environment may prove decisive, positively or negatively” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 34).

“Innate developmental potentials may be more general or more specific, more positive or more negative” and may be strong, equivocal or weak (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 33).

“It is the task of therapy to convince the patient of the developmental potential that is contained in his psychoneurotic processes. Obviously, to achieve that one has to show him this clearly and precisely on the concrete creative and ‘pathological’ dynamisms that are active in his case” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. viii). Thus, the presence of psychoneurotic dynamisms can be taken as another measurable sign of developmental potential.

Strong developmental potential (either positive or negative) is expressed regardless of the environment. Mild developmental potential may not be expressed unless the environment is optimal, if the potential is “not universal and of weak tension,”

the “environmental influence is to a very great degree responsible for the path which will be taken” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 12).

“The developmental process in which occur ‘collisions’ with the environment and with oneself begins as a consequence of the interplay of three factors: developmental potential, . . . an influence of the social milieu, and autonomous (self-determining) factors” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 77).

“The relations and interactions between the different components of the developmental potential give shape to individual development and control the appearance of psychoneuroses on different levels of development” Dąbrowski (1972, p. 78).

People with strong developmental potential “must have much more time for a deep, creative development and that is why [you] will be growing for a long time. This is a very common phenomenon among creative people. Simply, they have such a great developmental potential, ‘they have the stuff to develop’ and that is why it takes them longer to give it full expression” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 272).

Definition: “The constitutional endowment which determines the character and the extent of mental growth possible for a given individual” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 293).

Dąbrowski selected three aspects he felt could be used to assess developmental potential. “Developmental potential can be assessed on the basis of the following components: psychic overexcitability, special abilities and talents, and autonomous factors (notably the third factor)” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 293).

“No experiences, no shocks, no breakdowns will trigger growth if the embryo of what is to develop is not there” (Cienin [Dąbrowski], 1972a, p. 38).

“The whole process of transformation of primitive drives and impulsive functions into more reflective and refined functions occurs under the influence of evolutionary dynamisms which we call the developmental instinct” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 22).

“The developmental potential can be limited to the first and the second factors only. In that case we are dealing with individuals who throughout their life remain in the grip of social opinion and their own psychological typology (e.g. social climbers, fame seekers, those who say ‘I was born that way’ or ‘I am the product of my past’ and do not conceive of changing)” (Dąbrowski, 1996, pp. 14-15).

### ***Psychic overexcitability***

“Wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant. Sometimes the eagerness is more knit up with the motor activities, sometimes with the perceptions, sometimes with the imagination, sometimes with reflective thought. But, wherever it is found, there is the zest, the tingle, the excitement of reality; and there is ‘importance’ in the only real and positive sense in which importance ever anywhere can be” (James, 1899, pp. 9-10).

The basic forms of “hyperexcitability,” “psychic overexcitability” and “overexcitability” were described in Dąbrowski’s 1937 monograph.

Dąbrowski used the terms overexcitability and nervousness synonymously: “Psychic overexcitability is a term introduced to denote a variety of types of nervousness (Dąbrowski, 1938, 1959). Dąbrowski also defined nervousness as overexcitability: “Nervousness. Enhanced psychic overexcitability in the form of excitability of movements senses, affect, imagination, and intellect. Nervousness does not in any way entail the impairment of mental functions” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 299).

“Loosening of structure occurs particularly during the period of puberty and in states of nervousness, such as emotional, psychomotor, sensory, imaginative, and intellectual overexcitability” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 6).

“Each form of overexcitability points to a higher than average sensitivity of its receptors. As a result a person endowed with different forms of overexcitability reacts with surprise, puzzlement to many things, he collides with things, persons and events, which in turn brings him astonishment and disquietude. One could say that one who manifests a given form of overexcitability, and especially one who manifests several forms of overexcitability, sees reality in a different, stronger and more multisided manner. Reality for such an individual ceases to be indifferent but affects him deeply and leaves long-lasting impressions. Enhanced excitability is thus a means for more frequent interactions and a wider range of experiencing” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 7).

“Some forms of overexcitability constitute a richer developmental potential than others. Emotional (affective), imaginal and intellectual overexcitability are the richer forms. If they appear together they give rich possibilities of development and creativity” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 7).

“Because the sensitivity [excitability] is related to all essential groups of receptors of stimuli of the internal and external worlds it widens and enhances the field of consciousness” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 66).

“It is mainly mental hyperexcitability through which the search for something new, something different, more complex and more authentic can be accomplished” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 15).

Dąbrowski emphasized two aspects: a higher than average sensitivity of the nerves (receptors) and a higher than average responsiveness to stimuli: “The prefix over attached to ‘excitability’ serves to indicate that the reactions of excitation are over and above average in intensity, duration and frequency” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 7).

“It appears in five forms: emotional, imaginal, intellectual, psychomotor, and sensual” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 7).

“The five forms of overexcitability are the constitutional traits which make it possible to assess the strength of the developmental potential independently of the context of development” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 16).

“The reality of the external and of the inner world is conceived in all its multiple aspects. High overexcitability contributes to establishing multilevelness . . .” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 74).

“Enhanced excitability, especially in its higher forms, allows for a broader, richer, multilevel, and multidimensional perception of reality. The reality of the external and of the inner world is conceived in all its multiple aspects. High overexcitability contributes to establishing multilevelness, however in advanced development, both become components in a complex environment of developmental factors” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 74).

### **5). The three factors of development:**

Dąbrowski described three factors influencing behavior and development.

#### ***The factors***

“The first factor is in most part the genetic endowment that an individual inherits from his parents plus all lasting effects of pregnancy, birth defects, nutrition, drugs, etc. The second factor represents the influences of the external environment, mainly family and social milieu. The third factor represents the autonomous forces of self-directed development. In this sense the term “third factor” is used to denote the totality of the autonomous forces. In a stricter sense of a dynamism, the third factor is the agent of conscious choice in development. The third factor assumes gradually an essential part in human destiny and becomes the dominant dynamism of multilevel disintegration” (Dąbrowski, 1970, pp. 72-73).

The developmental potential can be limited to the first and the second factors only. In that case we are dealing with individuals who throughout their life remain in the grip of social opinion and their own psychological typology (e.g. social climbers, fame seekers, those who say “I was born that way” or “I am the product of my past” and do not conceive of changing). External influences from groups or individuals shape their behavior but not necessarily in a stable fashion. Changing influences shift the patterns of behavior or can deprive it of any pattern altogether. Autonomous developmental factors do not appear, and if they do only briefly, they do not take hold. (Dąbrowski, 1996, pp. 14-15).

The developmental potential may have its full complement of all three sets of factors. In that case the individual consciously struggles to overcome his social indoctrination and constitutional typology (e.g. a strongly introverted person works to reduce his tendency to withdraw by seeking contacts with others in a more frequent and satisfying fashion). Such a person becomes aware of his own development and his own autonomous hierarchy of values. He becomes more and more inner-directed. (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 15).

There is thus an important difference between the first two factors of development and the third. The first two factors allow only for *external motivation*, while the third is a factor of *internal motivation* in behavior and development. (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 15).

### ***The first factor (primarily heredity/instinctual)***

When “push comes to shove,” individuals primarily influenced by factor I will respond based upon their biological/instinctual needs, not social mores or social expectations, and not by an inherently unique and autonomous set of values reflecting a unique personality/approach to life. These individuals will have their own strivings, thoughts and feelings that will reflect the egocentrism and self-serving nature of factor I—the basic and fundamental satisfaction of one's own basic and instinctual needs over anything else.

The first factor plays a critical role in setting parameters and potentials for future development. “Our personality is shaped throughout our lives; our inborn characteristics constitute the basis determining our potential for inner growth” (Dąbrowski, 1967, p. iv).

### ***The second factor (heteronomous)***

The second factor represents the influences of the external environment, mainly family and social milieu. (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 72).

***The third factor (autonomous)***

The third factor is the dynamism of conscious choice by which an individual develops and exercises autonomy in expressing his or her unique personality characteristics. The third factor has a genetic basis but, as it develops, it becomes an emergent and autonomous force, transcending its genetic origins.

As third factor develops, it compels us to make choices that express our authentic self; seeking what is “more me” and rejecting aspects that are “less me.”

***In Dąbrowski's words:***

“As more intensive development of the personality occurs, and the disposing and directing center rises to a superior level, the third factor begins to play a greater role in development than does heredity or social environment. As we know, the third factor is an instrumental dynamism of man. Besides taking a negative or affirmative position with regard to one's own behavior, this factor takes a fundamental part in all periods of transformation in which new values replace old ones in the process of the complication and evolution of conscious life. The actions of choice, of negation and affirmation, with regard to the internal and external environment are very closely connected to the feeling of inferiority. In emotional experience, a negative attitude is regarded as inferior and an affirmative attitude is felt to be superior. The third factor constantly participates in all experiences of comparison of the personality ideal with the structure of the disposing and directing center, and with the direction and level of conduct in everyday life. The feeling of distance of this ideal from present activities determines the activity of the third factor and its support or disapproval of present pursuits” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 48).

“Along with inborn properties and the influence of environment, it is the “third factor” that determines the direction, degree, and distance of man's development. This dynamic evaluates and approves or disapproves of tendencies of the interior environment and of the influences of the external environment. It cooperates with the inner disposing and directing center in the formation of higher levels of individuality” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 53).

“The appearance and growth of the third agent is to some degree dependent on the inherited abilities and on environmental experiences, but as it develops it achieves an independence from these factors and through conscious differentiation and self-definition takes its own position in determining the course of development of personality” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 54).

“The principal periods during which the third agent appears distinctly are the ages of puberty and maturation” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 56).

“During the period of puberty, young people become aware of the sense of life and discover a need to develop personal goals and to find the tools for realizing them. The emergence of these problems and the philosophizing on them, with the participation of an intense emotional component, are characteristic features of a strong instinct of development and of the individual’s rise to a higher evolutionary level” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 56).

“In the common course of maturation a “premature” integration of mental structures occurs based on “the desire to gain a position, to become distinguished, to possess property, and to establish a family” and that “the more the integration of the mental structure grows, the more the influence of the third agent weakens. The third agent may even pass away altogether. The third agent persists—indeed, it only develops—in individuals who manifest an increased mental excitability and have at least mild forms of psychoneuroses. . . . The persisting and growing force of the third agent in adults appears simultaneously with the protraction of the period of maturation, with all of its positive and some of its negative qualities. This extension of the maturation period is clearly accompanied by a strong instinct of development, great creative capacities, a tendency to reach for perfection, and the appearance and development of self-consciousness, self-affirmation, and self-education” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 57).

“The third factor appears embryonically in unilevel disintegration, but its principal domain is multilevel disintegration. Disintegration activities are related to the activities of the third agent, which judges, approves and disapproves, makes a choice, and confirms certain exterior and interior values. It is, therefore, an integral and basic part of multilevel disintegration” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 59).

“The appearance and development of the third agent parallels the organization and establishment of the disposing and directing center on a higher level and the distinct formation and steady growth of the personality ideal. The third agent draws its dynamics and purpose from the disposing and directing center and the personality ideal; in turn, it plays an essential part in the development of both of them” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 60).

“We can only suppose that the autonomous factors derive from hereditary developmental potential and from positive environmental conditions; they are shaped by influences from both. However, the autonomous forces do not derive exclusively from hereditary and environment, but are also determined by the conscious development of the individual himself” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 34).

“All such autonomous factors, taken together, form the strongest group of causal dynamisms in the development of man. They denote the transition from that which is primitive, instinctive, automatic to that which is deliberate, creative and conscious, from that which is primitively integrated to that which manifests multilevel disintegration . . . from that which ‘is’ to that which ‘ought to be’ . . . The autonomous factors form the strongest dynamisms of transition from emotions of a low level to emotions of a high level” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 35).

“The third factor represents the autonomous forces of self-directed development. In this sense the term “third factor” is used to denote the totality of the autonomous forces. In a stricter sense of a dynamism the third factor is the agent of conscious choice in development. The third factor assumes gradually an essential part in human destiny and becomes the dominant dynamism of multilevel disintegration. It is a dynamism that coordinates the inner psychic milieu” (Dąbrowski, 1970, pp. 72-73).

[Comment: Dabrowski uses self consciousness in a relatively traditional way. The development of internal psychological structures and self-consciousness go hand in hand, thus development is associated with increasing levels of self-consciousness. At its pinnacle, self-consciousness synergistically develops with personality shaping. One's personality ideal shapes the direction and intensity of one's self-consciousness. Likewise, acute self-consciousness contributes to the process of personality shaping and development.]

“The third factor is independent from and selective with regard to heredity (the first factor), and environment (the second factor). Its selective role consists in accepting and fostering or rejecting and restraining qualities, interests and desires, which one finds either in one's hereditary endowment or in one's social environment. Thus the third factor being a dynamism of conscious choice is a dynamism of valuation. The third factor has a fundamental role in education-of-oneself, and in autopsychotherapy. Its presence and operation is essential in the development toward autonomy and authenticity. It arises and grows as a resultant of both positive hereditary endowment (especially the ability for inner psychic transformation) and positive environmental influences” (Dąbrowski, 1970, pp. 178-179).

The third factor involves a process of “conscious choice (valuation) by which one affirms or rejects certain qualities in oneself and in one's environment” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 306).

“At the roots of the third factor are the ability to distinguish between lower and higher mental strata” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 77).

“It is not easy to strictly define the origin of the third factor, because, in the last [traditional] analysis, it must stem either from the hereditary endowment or from the environment” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 78).

“According to the [TPD], the third factor arises in the course of an increasingly conscious, self-determined, autonomous and authentic development” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 78).

“The genesis of the third factor should be associated with the very development with which it is combined in the self-consciousness of the individual in the process of becoming more myself”; i.e., it is combined with the vertical differentiation of mental functions (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 78).

“This approach is close to some of the ideas of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) who maintained that more can be found in the effects than in the causes” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 78).

“The third factor is a dynamism active at the stage of organized multilevel disintegration. Its activity is autonomous in relation to the first factor (hereditary) and the second (environment)” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 80).

“The third set of factors represents those autonomous processes which a person brings into his development, such as inner conflict, self-awareness, choice and decision in relation to personal growth, conscious inner psychic transformation, subject-object in oneself. When the autonomous factors emerge, self-determination becomes possible, but not before” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 14).

[The third factor] “A dynamism of conscious choice by which one sets apart both in oneself and in one’s environment those elements which are positive, and therefore considered higher, from those which are negative, and therefore considered lower. By this process a person denies and rejects inferior demands of the internal as well as of the external milieu, and accepts, affirms and selects positive elements in either milieu” (Dąbrowski, 1996, pp. 38-39).

### ***Types of development and the factors***

#### **Heteronomous versus autonomous**

“there are two qualitatively different types of mental life: the heteronomous, determined by biological or environmental factors, and the autonomous, self-conscious, self-determined, and self-controlled mental development of man consists essentially in the transition to and deepening of the second type of life” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 11).

**“Normal’ development.** By this we mean a type of development which is most common and which entails the least amount of inner conflict and of psychological transformation. Development is limited to the maturational stages of human life and to the innate psychological type of the individual” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 20).

**“One-sided development.** Individuals endowed with special talents but lacking multilevel developmental potential realize their development mainly as a function of their ability and creativity. Such creativity, however, lacks universal components. Only some emotional and intellectual potentials develop very well while the rest remains undeveloped, in fact, it appears lacking” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 22).

“Normal’ and one-sided development are controlled primarily by the first two sets of factors, i.e. constitution and the environment” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 22).

**“Universal or accelerated development.** When all essential cognitive and emotional functions develop with relatively equal intensity and with relatively equal rate then development manifests strong multilevel character. The individual develops his potential simultaneously in intellectual, instinctive, emotional, aesthetic and moral areas. Such development manifests strong and multiple forms of overexcitability. But above all it distinctly manifests the individual’s awareness and conscious engagement in his own development. Here the autonomous developmental factors carry out the most extensive process of psychic transformation” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 21).

“Accelerated development is controlled primarily by the third, i.e. autonomous, set of factors. The stronger the autonomous factors the more resistant is development to the environment. This points to an important feature of accelerated development; it proceeds in opposition and conflict with the first and the second factor” (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 22).

## **6). Essentialism/existentialism:**

### ***Existential-essentialist compound***

Dąbrowski examined essentialism and existentialism and felt that neither approach was fully satisfactory, so he proposed a combination using essence as the primary aspect but also utilizing the role of free will and self-choice: the individual’s conscious involvement in his or her own development. Dąbrowski called this amalgamation the existential-essentialist compound.

“the two great philosophical trends essentialism and existentialism are reconciled and synthesized in a new way. It is not important whether we call this philosophical

synthesis an essentialist existentialism or an existentialist essentialism. The significant thing is the transcendence of those existentialist viewpoints which one-sidedly stressed the aspect of becoming in man with total disregard for the aspect of being and ended in obsessive concern with nothingness and despair. The new synthesis questions one of the basic tenets of existentialism, namely its claim that man has continuously to choose himself. In opposition to this Dąbrowski points out that certain choices are final and have lasting value” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 16).

“Those central, unchanging, essential qualities constitute the essence of man and, from the time of the formation and development of this ‘essence,’ the genuine, authentic existence of man begins. Then, and only then, the existentio-essentialist compound, characteristic of human beings, takes shape” (Dąbrowski, 1973, pp. 129-130).

### ***Essentialism***

“To be essentialist is to treat objects as if they ‘have essences or underlying natures that make them the thing that they are’ (Medin, 1989), and to treat them as if they have properties that result from these essences” (Barrett, 2001, p. 3).

Dąbrowski described two types of essences; one’s personality (individual essence) and the preservation of the central qualities of other persons (common essence).

“Essence is more important than existence for the birth of a truly human being” (Cienin [Dąbrowski], 1972a, p. 11).

“A true existentialism must be at the same time an individual existentialism, in the sense of emotional essence. . . . If I am an individual, if I have needs for identification, development and empathy, if I want to be unique, unrepeatable, if I want the same for others—that is to say, I want to see them as separate and unrepeatable—my essence must be emotional. . . . Essence is a value which I would not renounce because it determines the meaning of my life. Should I have to choose between existence without it and nonexistence, I would choose the second. It is emotional essence which gives the meaning to existence. . . . So the human being is not a homo sapiens but homo emotionalis, in, of course, the sense of higher emotions, feelings” (Cienin [Dąbrowski], 1972b, pp. 72-73)

“Personality can be described as a self-aware, self-chosen, self-affirmed, and self-determined unity of essential psychic qualities, of fundamental individual and universal “essences.” With the achievement of personality these essences continue to

undergo quantitative changes but not qualitative changes. These basic qualities or universal essences are: autonomy, empathy, authenticity, responsibility. The individual essences (qualities) are: (a) exclusive, unique, unrepeatable relationships of love and friendship; (b) consciously realized, chosen and realized primary interests and talents; (c) self-awareness of the history of one's own development and identification with this awareness" (Dąbrowski, 1972, pp. 180-181).

"By the essence of a human individual we mean those basic features of developing man which are self-conscious, self-chosen and self-educated" (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 92).

For Dąbrowski, essence is critical in personality: "from the standpoint of human problems, or particularly, the modern man, essence is not less important or posterior to existence, but possibly is more important in the personality of man" (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 129).

"Authenticism signifies the realization that the experience of essence, i.e. of the meaning and value of human experience, is more fundamental than the experience of existence" (Dąbrowski, 1996, p. 42).

### ***One's initial essence determines and limits development***

Dąbrowski said that the challenge of individual growth is the construction and creation of a personality based on one's idealization of one's personality. But, this construction must take place using the original essential material present at birth and as he emphasizes, this construction cannot be so broad as to permit qualitative changes to this original material or essence.

"Personality includes that which is unrepeatable, unique, essential, exclusive in human experience and in the structure of personality. Its basic central qualities are shaped from the time of its 'birth' and they do not undergo qualitative changes. Other qualities of some importance, but always somewhat marginal, may be added in further development. However, they could never replace the basic, central, essential qualities" (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 129).

### ***Existentialism***

Dąbrowski was influenced by the philosophers Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Nietzsche who "considered the role of making free choices, particularly regarding fundamental values and beliefs, and how such choices change the nature and identity of the chooser. Kierkegaard's knight of faith and Nietzsche's Übermensch are

representative of people who exhibit Freedom, in that they define the nature of their own existence. Nietzsche's idealized individual invents his or her own values and creates the very terms under which they excel" ("Existentialism," n.d., 19th century Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, para. 1).

It's not enough for an individual's essence to unfold, it must be consciously evaluated and developed—the lower aspects inhibited, the higher embraced—this ability is what differentiates humans from animals.

"Existentialist philosophy is an expression of the experiences of pain, suffering, depression, elevation, empathy, and above all, disquietude and anxiety. Here man goes beyond the tranquility of thought, of reasoning by means of abstract ideas. He lives and suffers; he, feels and experiences pain, disintegration, distraction and inner conflicts" (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 128).

"The existentialist cannot be mentally defective, cannot be mentally sick. The existentialist is the symbol mental health, and hence of capacity for accelerated development. He is none other than a highly developed psychoneurotic" (Cienin [Dąbrowski], 1972a, p. 8).

### **7). Authenticity/personality.**

For Dąbrowski, an individual whose behavior, thoughts and emotions are based primarily upon socialization is largely undeveloped—an inauthentic individual lacking any unique personality. Personality is a creation (reminiscent of Nietzsche's approach). Authenticity is marked by a high degree of integration and unity in expressing one's unique and autonomously developed personality. Personality is guided by an individual's sense of who he or she ought to be—Dąbrowski called this personality ideal. Authenticity is the expression of one's personality ideal.

(As would be expected, Dąbrowski used a multilevel approach to authenticity. Thus, on a low-level one can be governed by first factor and instincts and one could be called an authentic but very low-level individual. I think by definition, Dąbrowski would say that the individual governed by second factor would not reflect authentic behavior on either low or high levels).

#### ***In Dąbrowski's words:***

"It is one of the basic assumptions of the theory of positive disintegration that valuation when it expresses only the point of view of a culture, is unauthentic and unobjective" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 11).

“This means that in the process of fulfilling basic needs, there should remain some dissatisfaction to make room for introducing conditions which would permit the realization of human authenticity, and under which appears and matures awareness of and sensitivity to the meaning of life, to existential, and even transcendental concerns, hierarchies of values, intuition, even contemplation” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 36).

“No genuine mental conflicts, that is to say, conflicts involving self-consciousness and authenticity, can be solved by any means other than the individual’s conscious effort and inner growth” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 119).

“The road towards an independent authentic hierarchy of values is certainly very difficult, but it must be made clear that there is no other safe method open to man, because even the best system of moral norms does not work in practice, if its assimilation is not authentic and does not involve genuine inner psychic transformation. The idea of indiscriminate social adjustment, adaptation to what is, conformity to prevailing social standards, has to be replaced by qualified adjustment and, where necessary, positive maladjustment” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 120).

“Authentic life is, therefore, the grasp of the ‘drama of human existence’ in its growth, by taking into account its joy and suffering, its harmonies and conflicts, its tragedy and death, love and separation, development and breakdown. Authentic life is impossible without the search for a higher hierarchy of values, without close cooperation of intellectual and emotional spheres, without responsibility and a hierarchy of aims. Authentic life implies an understanding of others and involvement in their lives. This involvement comes from the development of empathy, and a correct diagnosis of the level of development of other people” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 144).

“Growing autonomy is the foundation of authenticity. Authenticity is possible only on the basis of a sufficiently developed autonomy, but it includes something more, namely the conscious understanding of one’s own identity, unrepeatability, uniqueness and responsibility. Authenticity is attainable only, if the individual is open to a wide range of experiences and capable of transforming them in a positive and creative way. . . . Autonomy and authenticity are connected with the need for a realization of “moral self-determination” in so far as the individual determines his own values, rather than having them determined by innate biological forces or social environment” (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 145).

“As a developmental force it is called here authenticism, a dynamism which consists in the feeling awareness and expression of one’s own emotional, intellectual and volitional attitudes, achieved through autonomous developmental transformations of one’s own hierarchy of values and aims. It involves a high degree of insight into oneself.

Authenticity is a symptom of independence from lower instinctive levels and selective independence from influences of the external environment and the inner psychic milieu. It brings about a high degree of unity of one's thinking, emotions and activity. Authentism involves conscious activity in accordance with one's "inner truth." The appearance and growth of authentism results from the operation of such dynamisms as dissatisfaction with oneself, (cf.), autonomy, (cf.) the third factor, (cf.) positive maladjustment, (cf.) 'subject-object' in oneself (cf.) inner psychic transformation and the personality ideal" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 163).

"A true and human authentism exists, therefore, only when a breakdown of man's structures and functions occurs, when one is upset or disrupted. This disruption is closely connected with the clear awareness of our similarities to the world of animal drives and with the added awareness of the need to become a true human being. . . . This disruption, this "inner crying" and humiliation are the symptoms of authentism. We move away from rigidity, away from the feeling of dignity, pride and ambition. We begin to experience sadness in spite of and because of ourselves, humiliation in relation to ourselves, the feeling of inferiority toward ourselves: we begin to manifest disquietude within ourselves and the awareness that we are dying to ourselves" (Cienin [Dąbrowski], 1972b, pp. 23-24)

"As a matter of fact, in the world of normal people there is almost no developed authentism because it would be something aggressive, too big a jump from the automatized, adjusted structure" (Cienin [Dąbrowski], 1972b, p. 84)

Personality: "A self-aware, self-chosen, self-affirmed, and self-determined unity of essential individual psychic qualities. Personality as defined here appears at the level of secondary-integration" (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 301).

"Authentism is acquired through deep and grave life experiences, inner conflicts and unceasing efforts. Therefore, the methods or aids in planning development and self-education must be based on authentic values, placed in our hierarchy of values, progressing from the lowest to the highest level of authentism" (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 93).

"Personality includes that which is unrepeatable, unique, essential, exclusive in human experience and in the structure of personality. Its basic central qualities are shaped from the time of its "birth" and they do not undergo qualitative changes. Other qualities of some importance, but always somewhat marginal, may be added in further development. However, they could never replace the basic, central, essential qualities" (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 129).

### 8). Dynamisms:

Traditionally, dynamisms are associated with systems of psychology that emphasize the interaction between different motives, emotions, and drives.

Dąbrowski was influenced by Constantin von Monakow, a Russian–Swiss neurologist. von Monakow presented a number of very metaphysical ideas to describe Nature, and in particular, human behavior. It is worthwhile to look at von Monakow's ideas in some detail. He suggested that every cell contains “the germ of emotions” that guides life toward a purposeful cosmos (Verplaetse, 2009).

von Monakow “gave the name *horme* to the impulse that drove creation to flourish and towards perfection, what Schopenhauer called *Wille* (will power). He went back to the Greek term for conscience, i.e. *syneidesis*, to denominate the regulating power of each organism. By *Klisis* (positive feedback) or *Ekklisis* (negative feedback), this biological conscience (this natural judge or cosmic compass—von Monakow's metaphors were inexhaustible) regulated the behaviour of all living organisms according to the teleological blueprint of the world. This *syneidesis* was latently active in the protoplasm. In higher animal species, conscience manifested itself in approving or disapproving emotions, but only in human beings did it develop into a complete moral consciousness. To von Monakow, justice was not at all a cultural matter; it also had its seat in the germplasm of each human individual” (Verplaetse, 2009, p. 140).

“Emotions were a guide to the whole of nature and human behavior in particular. Painful emotions censured certain intentions and types of behavior; pleasant emotions confirmed other intentions and types of behavior” (Verplaetse, 2009, p. 139). This biological sense of emotional regulation (orchestrated via a system of hormones) becomes conscious moral feelings of remorse and delight in humans, as mentioned above, developing into moral consciousness/conscience. I think it is informative to look at von Monakow's ideas in relation to Dąbrowski's view of emotions as the ultimate guide to one's behavior; the idea that our moral compass is emotional rather than cognitive.

In Dąbrowski's own words: “At the root of the instinctive dynamisms Von Monakow sees the mother dynamism of all instincts, namely *horme* (agitation, force, internal drive). ‘This is a tendency,’ writes Von Monakow, ‘for creative adaptation of oneself to conditions of life, in all its forms, in—order to ensure oneself a maximum security, not only at the present moment, but also for the long, long future.’ According to Von Monakow, an instinct (of an individual possessing a nervous system) ‘is a latent propulsive force, a derivative of *horme*, which realizes the synthesis of internal

excitations of protoplasm (introceptivity) and external excitations (exteroceptivity) in order to safeguard the vital interests of an individual and his species by means of adaptive activities.' As for embryonic development, Von Monakow introduces the conception of a formative instinct, which is a dynamism determining this development" (Dąbrowski, 1967, p. 50).

The ultimate dynamisms are the instinct of life and in particular, the developmental instinct because it is the most pervasive and basic developmental drive. Dąbrowski also describes many other features and structures as dynamisms that play a distinct role in personality development. Dąbrowski (see 1967) also used the terms instinct and dynamism somewhat interchangeably and said that within instincts there are transforming dynamisms, "In the instincts themselves, therefore, there exist transforming dynamisms, for which the conflictive experiences and participation of gnostic mechanisms are fundamental factors determining the development of a man" (Dąbrowski, 1967, p. 51).

"The basic, most general dynamism of a man, embracing all other more particular mechanisms, and revealing itself at the time of fecundation and differentiating itself in a particular way in every individual during his development, is the instinct of life. In various periods of development two groups of particular instincts are manifest in a man, and take a greater or smaller part in his actions. We call these instincts—possessing an egocentric or alterocentric, autotonic or syntonic component—autotonic and syntonic instincts. The first would include the self-preservation, possessive, fighting, and other instincts; the others, the "companion-seeking" instinct, sexual drive, maternal or paternal instinct, herd, cognitive, and religious instincts. The general separation of these two groups, in a sense the contradictoriness and the overlapping of structures of particular drives in both groups, already forms a fundamental basis for conflicts between instincts, for the collision of interests of particular instincts, and for new systems arising during the life of a personality" (Dąbrowski, 1967, p. 52).

"The various dynamisms presented here in their structure, action, and transformations we also call instincts. Our reason for including these forces among instincts is that, in our view, they are a common phenomenon at a certain level of man's development, they are basic derivatives of primitive instinctive dynamism, and their strength often exceeds the strength of the primitive maternal instinct" (Dąbrowski, 1967, p. 54).

"Biological or mental force controlling behavior and its development. Instincts, drives, and intellectual processes combined with emotions are dynamisms" (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 294).

“The whole process of transformation of primitive drives and impulsive functions into more reflective and refined functions occurs under the influence of evolutionary dynamisms which we call the developmental instinct” (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 22).

The dynamisms can also be categorized as disintegrative, as adding order and integrative or as reflecting secondary integration. Examples of dynamisms contributing to disintegration include; anxiety over oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself, feelings of shame and guilt and the feeling of inferiority to oneself. Organizing dynamisms include subject-object in oneself and the dynamism of third factor. Secondary integration dynamisms include the disposing and directing centre on a high level and the personality ideal.

### ***The hierarchy of major dynamisms***

Primary Integration:	[first and/or second factors] no dynamisms
Unilevel dynamisms:	ambitendencies ambivalences astonishment with oneself disquietude with oneself
Spontaneous multilevel dynamisms:	feelings of inferiority toward oneself feelings of shame and guilt dissatisfaction with oneself positive maladjustment creative dynamisms subject object
Organized multilevel dynamisms:	self awareness and self control education of oneself autopsychotherapy
Dynamisms of secondary integration:	autonomy and authenticity feeling of responsibility for oneself and others inner psychic transformation empathy and identification with others disposing and directing center on a high level third factor personality ideal

### ***The hierarchy of major human instincts***

Unilevel:	Developmental instinct
Spontaneous multilevel:	Self-development instinct
Organized multilevel:	Creativity
Secondary integration:	Self-perfection

### **9). Inner psychic milieu / disposing and directing center.**

The inner psychic milieu is the internal mental environment. At lower levels of development reactions tend to be instinctual or automatic. The more biologically determined one's behavior, the more instinctual one's reactions. Likewise, individuals who are dominated by socialization tend to react in automatic and stereotypic ways. These reactions typically involve little conscious cognitive processing and many individuals go through life in a largely robotic modality with minimal awareness of their internal mental environment. In contrast to this, once an individual becomes aware of his or her mental life, cognitions and emotions, the opportunity to build and shape the internal psychic environment presents itself. Extending this, the individual is able to begin to exercise autonomy in how he or she responds to the world and responses come to reflect the developing sense of the individual's personality ideal.

"The totality of mental dynamisms of a low or high degree of consciousness. The inner psychic milieu may be hierarchical, as in multilevel disintegration, or ahierarchical, as in unilevel disintegration" (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 296).

"the totality of mental dynamisms in a distinct or hierarchical setup" (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 116).

"A complex of mental dynamisms characteristic for a given individual" (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 62).

Development requires "the stimulation of higher functions and the inhibition of lower functions. This involves many kinds of sensitivity and excitability, numerous inner conflicts, [and the] emergence of multilevel inner forces, which can be called dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu" (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 62).

One must realize that a period even more important than that of early infancy is the period of "awakening" that brings about the development of the inner psychic milieu and its main dynamisms (Dąbrowski, 1967, p. vi).

Dąbrowski introduces the term "inner psychic milieu" (cf. glossary) as a collective name for all higher level developmental dynamisms and thus allows clearly to distinguish the two main qualitatively different stages and types of life: the heteronomous, which is biologically and socially determined, and the autonomous, which is determined by the multilevel dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 5).

In order to understand the process of positive disintegration it is necessary to consider the formation and growth of the inner psychic milieu. By this term we mean the totality of development dynamisms which operate in a hierarchical or nonhierarchical order, sometimes in cooperation, sometimes in conflict with one another. In proportion to the growth and hierarchical stratification of the inner psychic milieu we can notice at lower levels the vacillation of the disposing and directing center and its growing stability and identification with basic constituents of personality at higher levels. . . . Inner psychic milieu is a dynamic mental structure which appears significantly only at advanced stages of mental development, basically at the time of multilevel disintegration. At the level of primitive integration, strictly speaking, there is no inner psychic milieu. It arises later to the degree as developmental dynamisms are formed, particularly those of an autonomous nature such as the third factor, inner psychic transformation, authenticism, personality ideal, education of oneself and autopsychotherapy, the ability for meditation and contemplation (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 24).

A stimulus received by the nervous system evokes a reaction. The absorption of the stimulus constitutes the process of its interiorization. The reaction evoked by the stimulus constitutes the process of its exteriorization. The events that take place in the inner psychic milieu between interiorization and exteriorization constitute the process of transformation. This means that nothing is taken from the outside that would not be molded by the dynamism of inner psychic transformation. Similarly nothing leaves the inner psychic milieu without the active participation of this dynamism. The higher the level of the inner milieu, the more thorough is the process of inner psychic transformation of stimuli (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 74).

All the described dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu are decisive in the development of man. Appropriate understanding of such dynamisms, their level of development in individual cases, and their interactions, is necessary for the proper course of psychotherapy (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 81).

The sequence of transformative processes in inner growth is roughly as follows. At the stage of unilevel disintegration we observe loosening and sometimes disorganization of primitive mental activities. With the expansion of the inner psychic milieu its dynamisms undergo hierarchization (this means that one can distinguish whether a given dynamism operates at one level, and whether this level is high or low, or whether a given dynamism is vertical, i.e. one that spans the lower and the higher levels). With the development of a hierarchical structure the dynamisms are subsequently organized, they cooperate or clash with each other. When the inner psychic transformation becomes active the urge forces are slowly elevated to a higher-level. Superficial dystonic responses and an unconscious "rhythmic" character of

automatic responses gradually cease to operate. Consequently, consciousness of oneself and self-control increase. Under the influence of the third factor, which at this stage is one of the main inner dynamisms, the individual evaluates, and accepts or rejects, numerous stimuli from both the inner and outer environments. Every new stimulus and every new constellation of stimuli are worked over in the inner milieu, every external situation is an object of reflection prior to the formation of an external response (Dąbrowski, 1970, pp. 81-82).

The presence of a growing and hierarchically organized inner psychic milieu is a prerequisite for the formation of the dynamisms of autonomy and authenticism. The highest dynamisms stimulate developmental forces, but they inhibit more primitive urges, thus providing the conditions for the emergence of the dynamisms of autonomy and authenticism (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 85).

[27.] The transition from unilevel to multilevel disintegration is accompanied by gradual formation and growth of the inner psychic milieu. In higher stages of multilevel disintegration the growth of these dynamisms reaches the point at which a distinct, individualized inner psychic milieu is noticeable. This phenomenon indicates that personality started to take shape (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 143).

[29.] A sufficiently developed inner psychic milieu causes growing understanding and experiencing of one's own development and of the development of others, of the negative and positive facets of each actual phase of development and the conscious direction and control of the development (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 144).

[31.] The capacity for conscious and autonomous evaluation of one's own behavior and the behavior of others increases in proportion to the development of inner psychic milieu and developmental transformations of instincts and emotions (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 145).

[32.] The more developed is the inner psychic milieu, the stronger and deeper is [one's] syntony [to be in tune with; in harmony with] with the external environment. . . . A sufficiently developed inner psychic milieu creates conditions for a less self-centered attitude with regard to oneself and to the external environment. This is the result of the operation of the dynamisms of multilevel disintegration, and particularly of the dynamisms of "subject-object" in oneself, the third factor, the dynamisms of identification and inner psychic transformation (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 146).

[Comment: at first, this may seem counterintuitive in reading Dąbrowski. Much of what he says advocates for the differentiation of the individual from the external environment and from one's social influences—"to be one's own person." But, with

advanced development, a more sophisticated and more satisfying relationship with the external environment develops. Dabrowski used to say that one of the challenges of advanced development is to "forgive each other our psychological type." The individual who has more internal development is more secure within him or herself and one can walk down the street without having to feel superior to others, or to feel the need to pick apart and denigrate the thinking and philosophy of others. Through subject-object one can come to appreciate and accept how different one is from others and, as well, to come to appreciate and accept the differences in those around us. This allows the developed individual to feel more at ease in the world—based on the unconscious but positive connection made with the external world through syntony.]

The inner psychic milieu at a higher level, self-consciousness, self-control, and inner psychic transformation, are, as a rule, connected with the positive course of neuroses (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 154).

The formation and growth of the inner psychic milieu concomitant to the development of a multilevel mental structure must of necessity involve inner conflicts between different levels of functions. It involves maladjustment to what is and adjustment to what ought to be (Dąbrowski, 1970, pp. 154-55).

[65.] The growth of the inner psychic milieu correlates with proportionate growth of positive and authentic relations with the external environment (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 159).

Inner psychic milieu (internal mental environment): that part of the psyche where man enters into conflict with himself, the totality of mental dynamisms of a low or high degree of consciousness operating in a more or less hierarchical organization. These dynamisms are basically in a relation of cooperation which, however, does not exclude developmental conflicts. They perform the main task of positive disintegration at the stage of multilevel disintegration by participation in the transformation of mental functions and structures in the direction of higher levels up to the level of fully developed personality. All the dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu, largely speaking, may be divided into unilevel and multilevel. Ambivalences and ambitendencies are unilevel dynamisms, all other are multilevel. (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 170).

In multilevel disintegration there is a complication of the unilevel process by the involvement of additional hierarchical levels. There is loosening and fragmentation of the internal environment, as in unilevel disintegration, but here it occurs at both higher and lower strata. These levels are in conflict with one another; their valence is determined by the disposing and directing center, which moves the individual in the direction of his personality ideal (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 8).

Disintegration causes the movement of the disposing and directing center to either higher or lower levels but with a gradual tendency for stabilization at a superior level of development. To the degree that the disposing and directing center takes its place at higher levels, the individual begins to live more closely in accordance with his own personality ideal (Dąbrowski, 1964, pp. 40-41).

For self-education there must be a conscious personality ideal and a desire to ascend to this ideal. It is accomplished through increasing organization of the disposing and directing center, which activates the third agent and its obsession for evaluation of present levels of feelings and activities (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 49).

The formation of personality depends upon the existence of positive processes of disintegration in a given individual, upon the level of the disposing and directing center, and upon the personality ideal (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 58).

The disposing and directing center of a developing personality is a more or less organized mental structure, emerging from as yet indistinct tendencies to attain a higher cultural and moral level (Dąbrowski, 1964, pp. 59-60).

The appearance and development of the third agent parallels the organization and establishment of the disposing and directing center on a higher level and the distinct formation and steady growth of the personality ideal. The third agent draws its dynamics and purpose from the disposing and directing center and the personality ideal; in turn, it plays an essential part in the development of both of them (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 60).

### ***Disposing and directing center.***

Dąbrowski initially defines the disposing and directing center as “a set of dynamics determining the course of the individual” (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. xxvi).

Disposing and directing center. This is a dynamism which coordinates, plans, organizes and governs the activity of the psyche in a definite domain at a given time. On the level of primitive integration it is identified with the dominating drive or group of drives. In other words it is determined biologically. In unilevel disintegration mental structures are loosened or broken down into various dynamisms. Between themselves the dynamisms are loosely connected and often mutually contradictory. Here we are dealing with a multiplicity of disposing and directing centers which represent conflicting dynamisms or complexes of strivings and emotions, so that we speak of many “wills,” For instance, it is rather common during puberty to have the conflicting feelings of inferiority and superiority present at the same time. Similar pairs of conflicting

dynamisms are: egocentrism and alterocentrism, depression and excitation, syntony and asyntony (isolation from others). These conflicting groups represent antagonistic disposing and directing centers. Besides conflict and antagonism different disposing and directing centers can confront each other, or they can cooperate and join together. . . . In multilevel disintegration, the stage of the formation of inner psychic milieu and of a hierarchy of dynamisms, there appear various disposing and directing centers; each representing antagonistic levels of the inner structure: those which are determined by primitive drives and those which are closer to the emerging personality. . . . Disposing and directing centers that at first are united with drive or a group of drives begin with time to free themselves and gradually gain control over those drives. On a high level the disposing and directing center is not identified anymore with drives but becomes the controlling agent of development (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 79).

Disposing and directing center is the dynamism which determines each act of an individual as well as his long range behavior, plans and aspiration. It performs the following: programming, planning, organizing, collaborating, general and concrete deciding. At a lower level its role is fulfilled by various primitive drives (e.g. sexual, self-preservation, etc.) which temporarily or permanently direct and control individual's life and conscious activities. Only at a higher stage, particularly during multilevel disintegration, the disposing and directing center appears and develops as an independent dynamism, not identical with any one or any combination of other dynamisms (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 166).

It is important that the building of a disposing and directing center at a high level, with a personality ideal included, based on the grounds of a sincere need for moral standards, develop harmoniously with the formation of her inner psychic milieu and the deepening of multilevel disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 284).

[The disposing and directing center] A center which controls behavior over a short or long period of time. At a low level of human development this center is identical with either one or a group of primitive drives (e.g. self-preservation, sexual, aggressive, etc.). At higher levels of development this center becomes an independent dynamism working towards harmonious unification of personality (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 293-294).

It is, according to our view, a dynamism or group of dynamisms organizing and directing our behavior. It undergoes hierarchic multilevel transformations and is subordinated to the laws of mental development. Its structure and functions depend on the level of the individuals developmental phase (Dąbrowski, 1973, pp. 101-102).

On the highest level, that is to say, on the border of the fourth and fifth stages, as well as, on the stage of secondary integration, we have only one disposing and directing

center which synthesizes intuitively all human tendencies, identifies itself with personality and its ideal and develops its own activity in unity with persona I through “insight,” meditation and contemplation (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 103).

### **10). Subject-object in oneself:**

This dynamism reflects one’s level of personality development. The individual at a low level of development will be primarily externally focused and will have very little interest or understanding of his or her deep psychic life. There will be a low level of self-consciousness, decisions will be made quickly and reactively with little reflection, either before or after. One’s life becomes repetitive and automatic, one day lived after the other, with little reflection on one’s deeper life’s purpose. Conflicts will arise between the individual and external obstacles but there will be few internal psychological conflicts (no crises of conscience). Behavior is justified as an extension of what was done yesterday or based on social and peer behavior; “if my neighbor can do that, so can I.” These individuals often see others and the world as an extension of themselves and so therefore are dominated by subjectivity. With development, an awareness and interest of one’s internal psychic life takes place and through a process of growth, the individual is able to develop a sense of objectivity towards oneself and one’s thought processes and emotions. One can see one’s own inner psychic milieu as if from outside. This initially contributes to inner conflicts and disintegration because one often perceives aspects of oneself that one reacts to with dissatisfaction. At the same time, others are seen as individuals in their own right and ultimately are seen subjectively: one sees the other as if the other were oneself. This represents a deep level of compassion and empathy leading to an appreciation of the essence and uniqueness of the other individual. This facilitates the basis for love on a deep level. Subject-object works in close conjunction with other dynamisms, for example, dissatisfaction with oneself, with one’s developing third factor, the inner psychic milieu and the disposing and directing center and eventually one’s personality ideal.

The subject-object process: a normal aspect of positive disintegration in which two structures are opposed to each other in self-differentiation (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 38).

The operations of “subject-object” become clear when all introspective activities of the individual are taken into consideration. This ability to evaluate various aspects of the self can be understood by examination of its differential activities connected with the internal experiences of the individual. In multilevel disintegration this dynamic of “subject-object” plays a part not only in the internal development of tension but, even more important, in the multiple changes in time and space which result in hierarchical movement and in the elaboration of a new disposing and directing center as it gradually reaches new and higher levels of development. “Subject-object” is closely related to the

processes previously discussed: disquietude, shame, discontentment with oneself, feelings of guilt, and inferiority feelings toward oneself. These processes are, to some extent, the expression of object-subject forces in the psychic internal environment. Such forces increase the intensity of all processes acting in the internal psychic environment (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 40).

[The psychoneurotic] experiences within himself the “subject-object” process—an increased self-awareness and an introspective knowledge of the many levels of his own personality. This is a process of experiencing one’s own being, so to speak, of sensing one’s own multiform nature which determines the process of cognition as well as of experiencing. The psychoneurotic’s personality is plastic and variable since he is in a dynamic state of awareness of the subtleties of both his internal and his external environment. He is, therefore, a personality capable of disintegration and has the ability for distinct and often rapid development (Dąbrowski, 1964, p. 74).

So-called self-education really involves a division of the personality into two parts—the “subject-object relationship” Dąbrowski calls it—one of which is teacher and the other pupil (Dąbrowski, 1967, p. xxviii).

A “subject-object” process takes place in one’s own self. One’s internal milieu is divided into higher and lower, into better and worse, and into desirable and undesirable. There appears here the feeling of “lower value” and the feeling of guilt when one “falls down” to a lower level, knowing that he actually has the capacity to raise himself up. He knows this as his memory tells him of the pleasant moments of past achievements (Dąbrowski, 1967, pp. 69-70).

We call this taking of interest by an individual in his own psychic life, and the ability for an ever wider and deeper penetration of it, the dynamism of “subject-object in oneself,” that is, in the psychic structure of one and the same person. The advent of this dynamism means that interest in the internal environment begins to prevail over interest in the external world. This dynamism is a key that permits the individual to open his own psyche for observation by himself. Thanks to this dynamism the subject “objectifies,” as it were, its contents, grasping them almost as external phenomena, which permits a fuller, matter-of-fact, less subjective knowledge and treatment of them. The mechanisms of this dynamism, combined with the progressing development of a personality, become for the person an ever more subtle and ever more universal instrument in self-cognition, in discovering in oneself and becoming aware of the subliminal contents thus far unknown to oneself. . . . Progressive self-cognizance, realized by means of the “subject-object in oneself” dynamism, permits one to utilize this cognizance in a more purposeful, more effective, and accelerated shaping of personality

in oneself and facilitates the work of other developmental dynamisms (Dąbrowski, 1967, pp. 102-103).

Dynamism “subject-object” in oneself: the practice of inner self-observation for the sake of mental development. It involves constant, objective and dynamic self exploration in which the observer and the observed are both present in the same inner milieu. Here the mind learns to grasp all the essential elements and movement of inner life and develops this particular watchfulness that enables one to sense the direction of events occurring in the inner milieu. The recognition of one’s inner self (subject) as that which feels, thinks and desires, brings about a sense of one’s uniqueness and personal identity. This leads to understanding through experience of one’s own essence. In consequence it leads to the understanding (and perhaps even an experience) of the essence of another. It is due to this dynamism that the individual begins to be interested in his own inner life, and as the dynamism assumes increasing importance so this interest grows, both consciously and subconsciously. Thanks to this factor evolves certain readiness and alertness of the cognitive and developmental instinct in the service of the growth of personality. The ability to discern various aspects of one’s inner life develops through observation of the action of different dynamisms, their correlations and their operation on different levels. The dynamism “subject object” in oneself plays an important role in multilevel disintegration by participating in the development and fluctuation of inner tension. It also influences spatial and temporal changes in the inner psychic milieu, which result in its more defined hierarchization and the establishment of a new disposing and directing center on a higher level (Dąbrowski, 1970, p. 71).

“One of the main developmental dynamisms which consists in observing one’s own mental life in an attempt to better understand oneself and to evaluate oneself critically. It is a process of looking at oneself as if from outside (the self as object) and of perceiving the individuality of others (the other as subject, i.e. individual knower)” (Dąbrowski, 1972, p. 305).

The meaning and task of the dynamism “subject-object” in oneself goes clearly beyond that of introspection. This dynamism introduces a kind of dualism into our mental life in which the subject deals with the elements of his inner life as though they were objective, external things. In this way the individual gains knowledge of himself, of his motives and aims. He takes a critical look at his moral, social and cultural attitudes. Growing self-knowledge, attained through the application of the dynamism “subject-object” in oneself, assists in the elaboration of an autonomous hierarchy of values and the shaping of one’s own personality (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 74).

The level of this dynamism correspond [sic] to the degree in which we deal with others as subjects, as unique, unrepeatable individuals. An egocentric individual, unable

to distinguish the object from the subject in himself, approaches other people in the same way he approaches material things and animals. He treats them as objects, does not empathize or identify himself with other people. Thus, internal rigidity and egocentrism are associated with the inability to see others in a multilevel perspective, to show reflective sympathy, genuine concern, compassion and respect. The dynamism “subject-object” in oneself is clearly incompatible with such a rigid, primitively integrated structure (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 75).

Conscious educational activity on a high level is impossible without continuous use of this dynamism. It is also crucial in any activity rooted in the concern over one’s own mental and moral growth. It is the condition sine qua non for an existentialist conception of the relationship between “I” and “Thou,” in the empirical sense; accessible to us in this life, as well as, in Kierkegaard’s “absolute” sense which goes beyond the dimension of this life. Kierkegaard’s existentialist conception of man involves hierarchization of values and a developmental transition to higher stages of life (Dąbrowski, 1973, p. 76).

“Most people are subjective toward themselves and objective toward all others, frightfully objective sometimes: but the task is precisely to be objective toward oneself and subjective toward all others” (Kierkegaard: Works of love).

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