

Where Maslow Becomes Dabrowski – The Emergence of the Fourth Factor

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To quote Maslow:

“I have recently found it more and more useful to differentiate between two kinds of self-actualizing people, those who were clearly healthy, but with little or no experiences of transcendence, and those in whom transcendent experiencing was important and even central... It is unfortunate that I can no longer be theoretically neat at this level. I find not only self-actualizing persons who transcend, but also non-healthy people, non-self-actualizers who have important transcendent experiences. It seems to me that I have found some degree of transcendence in many people other than self-actualizing ones as I have defined this term...”

This is precisely the place in which Maslow’s theory can be extended to Dabrowski’s. These “transcendent experiences” likely correspond to Dabrowski’s crises. The pre-actualization crises are already explained by Dabrowski’s levels II-IV of disintegration. However, if we synthesize the two concepts, Dabrowski claims the final crisis propels an individual to self-actualization, which is characterized by inner harmony, but Maslow claims that further transcendent experiences exist!

So which is right? Well, probably both, in different senses. Dabrowski’s “level 5” is a state in which one’s behavior is completely self-constructed (based on “the third factor”, which is an individual’s drive towards growth and autonomy), which should bring about an internal peace. It is not quite the same thing as Maslow’s self-actualization, but both systems entail the transcendence of basic human needs and attainment of potential: the desire to reconcile *what should be* with *what is*. Because a “drive towards growth” entails continuously striving for better situations, such value systems *will* change with time, to be replaced by value systems that the individual considers “higher” as his or her perspective, knowledge, and self-expectations shift! (It is worth noting that we avoid infinite recursion because the “meta-values” are responses to internal or external circumstances embedded within the value system itself; there is no such thing as a separate “meta-value”, which would require a “meta-meta-value”, and that a “meta-meta-meta value”, ...).

Thus, we have a **level 6** state, *Meta-Integration*, in which the value system *itself* becomes subject to an individual’s scrutiny. This state is likely the final resting point of the fully actualized psyche, but only because it is iterative: it represents a “punctuated equilibrium” of peaceful periods followed by intense and quite deliberately guided revisions (which are, in a sense, rapidly occurring re-disintegrations) due to rapid changes in one’s underlying values brought about by what Maslow calls “transcendent experiences”. Thus, disintegration is not a single event, but a continuous and lifelong process, even for those who have already experienced secondary integration.

We can theoretically call self-scrutiny the “fourth factor”, since it is not precisely any of the other three as stated, but it’s more like an inwardly-turned version of the third. Still, the step from being certain in one’s value systems (though a healthier condition than relying upon society or self-benefit to justify one’s behaviors) to devising value systems that are internally consistent and stable, yet flexible as the individual gains new knowledge and experience is clearly a healthy one: we can never acquire the sum total of the world’s knowledge or experience, so absolute rigidity is pathological. Dabrowski himself was the one who stated that healthy people must accept the world as it is, and it is *not* rigid.

The step from Level 5 to Level 6 is *huge*, however, perhaps even to the extent of the step from Level 1 to Level 2, as it requires *abandoning stability*. However, it is necessary to fully achieve one’s potential, rather than to simply act as the image of one particular basis of values, even one that was self-chosen, because values are *fluid*. It represents the extension of one’s moral reasoning from synchronic to diachronic, as one can now envision a *direction* or *change* in a value system, and thus an internally driven future expectation. Though (barely) expressible in Maslow’s theory through his addition of “transcendent events”, this is impossible to describe in Dabrowski’s theory as Dabrowski stated it.

So how can we summarize this?

- Secondary Integration represents a point of stability, but people operating at Level 5, though “self-actualized”, do not have the ability to effectively question their own value systems as new internal or external circumstances compel them to.
- The initial crisis that forces a person to adopt a new set of values does not represent negative adjustment unless it indicates a regression to social or self-driven values (the first or second factors). If the revision to one’s value system is conscious and directed, it represents a transition to a higher level of development rather than a lower one, which we call Level 6 - “Meta-Integration”, since it is a disintegration of value systems.
- Paradoxically, this state is not as stable as Level 5, as it undergoes rapid periods of change coincident with Maslow’s “Transcendent Events”. When not undergoing these changes, it is at least as stable as Level 5, as one’s behavior is not only consistent with one’s value system, but one’s value system is consistent with one’s circumstances and expectations.
- Because this can happen many times, it likely represents the final state of the psyche. Thus, even a self-actualized person must undergo crises from time-to-time; the highest state of consciousness is still directed by the presence of distress (this would be depressing save that the result is a more personally-optimal value-system, so the hardship is greatly offset by the newfound knowledge; it can be thought of as learning).
- The inward expression of the third factor to the end of self-examination can be considered a “fourth-factor” that has not yet emerged at level 5. It’s not really distinct from the third, however, if the third factor is extended to self-examination in addition to conscious reconciliations of the principles of the internal and external worlds.
- It’s a big jump, and many self-actualized people do not successfully make it. Such people likely remain at Level 5 rather than negatively adjusting, as they are already convinced of the rectitude of their value systems. These are the artists or scientists who ply their craft

in a manner that they are convinced is correct due to their internal values, but are unable to abstract themselves away from the situation and ask “is this really correct anymore?”

With this addition, Dabrowski’s theory falls neatly into place with Maslow’s and my own. I think it’s quite an elegant and powerful idea that unifies two major developmental theories.

Also see my earlier extension of Dabrowski’s Level 1:

“First and second factors may lead to highly distinct motivations, though they intertwine in many cases. The second factor represents less of a danger to society than the first; therefore I would split Dabrowski’s Level I in three: Level 0, those motivated primarily by the first factor without regard for the second (colloquially, psychopaths), Level Ia, those motivated equally by both first and second factors, and Level Ib, those motivated primarily by the second factor. Those operating at Level 0 would have few scruples regarding criminal and socially detrimental behavior, while those at Level Ib would be vehemently opposed to such behavior (so long as it conflicts with prevailing social norms). We may then refine Dabrowski’s hypothesis that most operate at Level I to one where most operate at Level Ia. No crisis or OE is required to transition from Level Ia to Ib, therefore we may not reasonably call Level Ib Level II. However, those operating at Level Ib have taken the critical step of rejecting the dominating influence of the first factor and need only reject the second to advance, so they are “closer” in a sense.”

And:

“The first and second factors are not equivalent motivators, functionally or cognitively. They should not be placed at the same level of personality development. Doing so equates pathological individuals such as psychopaths with the masses, who generally cause no problems beyond those their society compels them to. For example, here’s how grouping these into one cognitive level produces confusion:

“The great majority of population lives on and rarely grows beyond the level of primary integration. The most primitively integrated character structures are observed in psychopaths and psychopath-like individuals, who suffer from “emotional retardation,” characterized by inability to experience empathy and guilt.

On the level of primary integration, we can observe two forms of adjustment of an individual to society: negative adjustment – non-creative adaptation, characterized by conformity to social conventions, lack of reflection and criticism in approach to reality, adjustment to “what is;” and negative maladjustment, which is disregard for social norms and conventions stemming from extreme egocentrism and ruthless realization of one’s lower level goals (psychopaths, criminals).” (talentdevelop.com)

Here we have two separate processes being described as if they are common approaches, when in reality, these are intrinsic responses, the first of which the great majority of individuals will adopt. The second response is only reserved for people who really should be classed at a lower cognitive level, for they are only governed by the first factor.

Thus my complete theory has eight total levels and spans a wider range of cognitive development than Dabrowski's by extending the endpoints in both directions.