

**WILLIAM J. HAGUE**

## **DEVELOPMENT THROUGH VALUES AND INTUITION IN THE THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION**

**Contents of Article: Value Hierarchies in the Theory of Positive Disintegration, Authentic Subjectivity, Intuition in Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory, Multilevelness in Kazimierz Dąbrowski's Theory, The Higher Level Dynamism of Objectivity, Intuition as a Multilevel Concept, An Aside, Objective Hermeneutics, Postscript, Bibliography.**

In this paper, as in one that I delivered at the Third International Conference on the Theory of Positive Disintegration in Miami (1980), I would like to reaffirm that the Positive Disintegration Theory speaks to a very real and critical problem of our times — the problem of how we might find objective values. This you know already — through exploring multilevelness, particularly at higher levels of development.

But the new strings that have been added to the harp to give it a richer melody are a new appreciation from a constructionist view that objectivity and subjectivity are not polar concepts. Rather, objectivity is to be found in authentic subjectivity. I will propose "intuition" as a concept capable of bridging the gap between the Positive Disintegration Theory and other psychologies, and I will offer a brief perusal of levels of intuition — something which, as far as I know, has not previously been done. Another (and you will be happy to know) final newly-added string will be an appreciation of how constructing a hierarchy of values is essentially a hermeneutical task. In this area the phenomenologists contribute to the theory the concept of "objective hermeneutics". Those are the main points I have to make, and thus they summarize this paper. Those are the new strings I have added to my harp. Thus this may be given, in the classical tradition of Izaak Walton, the title: "The Compleat Lyre".

Matters of value were always close to the heart of Kazimierz Dąbrowski. Not only is Positive Disintegration a value-laden theory, but Dr. Dąbrowski, was himself a man of principle and concerned deeply for the directions society was taking. It is value in this second sense — not just as a preference for one thing over another, as one might choose a Van Gogh over a Rembrandt — but value in the moral imperative sense of oughtness, moral value, that this paper primarily addresses. The quest, as was Dąbrowski's, is for objective moral values. My point is that the Theory of Positive Disintegration has something special to contribute to this quest. Objective values (including moral values) are to be found not through cognitive functioning alone as cognitive developmentalism maintains, nor through feeling by itself as emotivism purports, but in a more holistic, systemic, multilevel approach inherent in the Theory of Positive Disintegration.

Philippa Foot laments the fact that moral philosophers have a penchant for leaving gaps in their philosophical understanding of the values of different societies. She attributes this to "conventions that forbid the philosopher to fill chapters with descriptive material about human nature and human life. It isn't supposed to be part of his work to think in a somewhat discursive way that is suitable to reflections about the human heart, and the life of men in society" (Foot 1982, p. 165). It is one of the goals of this essay to, in some small way, help fill one of these gaps. It is my conviction that the Positive Disintegration Theory still carries the stamp that Kazimierz Dąbrowski placed so firmly upon it — a deep reflection about "the human heart, and the life of men in society".

## **VALUE HIERARCHIES IN THE THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION**

In my recent research into value hierarchies I have been using the Rokeach Value Survey, not to measure the values of my subjects but to examine the process of forming a hierarchy of values. I asked them not just to rank order their values as the RVS requests, but to write down their comments on the process of frank ordering as they attempted to do it. Interesting things happened. The questions, confusions and challenges they raised not only throw doubt on the RVS as an instrument for measuring an individual's values, but (more importantly and more relevant to our topic here) their remarks bring out the sharp contrast between merely rank-ordering a list of values and forming an actual hierarchy of values. In a nutshell, values cannot be strung out like washing on a clothes line in some serial fashion; instead they form a hierarchy (or heterarchy) which means they are in constant relationship with each other, constant tension with each other. The best way I can put it is to say that values are conscious of each other. It is a systemic relationship; a value can be considered only in its relationship to other values.

Thus, in the remainder of this paper, I am not going to talk about specific values or specific moral rules or where certain values "ought" to be in one's hierarchy, but I am going to talk about values as a system, and address the question of whether one can lay claim to hierarchy of values as something objective. It is a question central to the Theory of Disintegration, a question Dąbrowski himself pursued and one to which we can perhaps add something today. We will concentrate on the higher levels of development because that is where objectivity is best constructed. That is because, in the Dąbrowskian paradigm, higher levels are characterized by superior subject-object relationships, and authenticity related to the personality ideal. But we will not neglect the lower levels — the common man and woman — because objectivity to some degree is attainable by the less-than- eminent person in what I will be calling a "hermeneutic dialogue".

## **AUTHENTIC SUBJECTIVITY**

Our approach to the question of moral objectivity springs from a deceptively simple statement of Bernard Lonergan: "Objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity" (Lonergan 1974, p. 214). But notice that Lonergan says: Objectivity is not the fruit of just any such objectivity, but of authentic subjectivity, and, as I shall propose, is related to the level of authenticity within the individual. What immediately needs to be done, then, with Lonergan's statement, is to explore the meaning or meanings of "authentic subjectivity". And here is the key Dąbrowski offers with the novel core paradigm of the Theory of Positive Disintegration — the concept of multilevelness — that not only are there levels of development in the traditional chronological sense but there are qualitative levels within concepts and psychological functions. That there are levels within the concept of "authentic subjectivity" will be offered as a suitable approach to the objectivity question.

"Authenticity" in this sense becomes a dynamic concept. Since we are in the realm of morality, mere speculative judgments of value are not enough; it is only in performance, in the pursuit of moral good, that authenticity is found. It is to his credit that Dąbrowski, in his wisdom, insisted not only on a hierarchy of values, but on a hierarchy of aims — on values carried over through intention into action. With decision and choice, one makes oneself an authentic or unauthentic subject.

To explore the levels of authentic subjectivity we will return to an old, but recently revitalized word in the psychology of morals — "intuition". We will explore intuition as a

holistic, multilevel term for understanding the possibility of attaining moral objectivity through "authentic subjectivity". To me intuition, though not a much developed word in the Positive Disintegration Theory, deserves our attention. It can be the bridge between the Positive Disintegration Theory and present-day moral psychology carrying the holism of Dabrowski's theory into that splintered territory of moral philosophy and the psychology of values.

### **INTUITION IN LAWRENCE KOHLBERG'S THEORY**

I have mentioned intuition as an old but renewed term in moral philosophy and psychology. One person responsible for this resurrection is no less than Lawrence Kohlberg. Under the influence of his critics (notably Carol Gilligan) Kohlberg in 1984 begrudgingly acknowledged the existence of "B type" persons who gave Stage 5 "right answers" to his dilemmas, as the result of an intuitive understanding of the core reasons for their choices. "A type B person is someone who intuitively or in his or her "heart" or, "conscience" perceives the central values and obligations... articulated rationally by Stage 5 and uses these intuitions to generate a judgment of responsibility ...implied then is the "Platonic", "Kantian" or "intuitionist" view that the conscience can dimly intuit rationally principled justice and act accordingly" (Kohlberg 1984a, p. 63).

One who has only a unilevel view of intuition is in danger of giving it credit only for dimly intuiting. If we have a multilevel view we perhaps can credit conscience with the capacity for "brighter", more objective intuitions. Interestingly, we need go no further than Kohlberg himself to find someone exploring (without using the terminology) the many levels of intuition in pursuit of moral objectivity, and finding that objectivity at higher levels of intuition. Kohlberg's excursion into Stage 7 in 1970 and his recent updatings of his thought (Kohlberg 1984b) develop this. Fifteen years ago Kohlberg called Stage 7 a metaphor and not really a stage at all. More recently (Kohlberg 1984b) he elevated it to a soft stage.

Whatever its status, it was meant "to take away from Stage 6 the excessive demands placed on it, the demand that it provide the answer to the problems of the meaning of life" (Kohlberg 1970, p. 3). Kohlberg found in Stage 7 "an emotionally powerful intuitive grasp of reality that a metaphysics can only in a limited way express conceptually" (Kohlberg 1981, p. 369). The beginnings of a multilevel approach were expressed by Kohlberg and Candee (Kohlberg 1984a, p. 64) when they said that type B judgments rest on a content-related and teleological intuition of a natural hierarchy among nine universal moral norms and that this hierarchy is "dimly perceived at the type B perspective from Stage 2 onward, but it is only at Stage 5 that the hierarchies become consensual...". Going even further, Kohlberg described Stage 7 as taking the postconventional person beyond the merely rational into the experiential, the religious, and even the mystical where a whole person, not just a cognitive person, is intuitively active in finding a will to meaning and a will to be moral, despite apparent meaninglessness and the immorality of the world as it exists. Kohlberg has said "Mystical experiences that are religiously significant are those in which the oneness of being is disclosed and the subject-object duality is overcome" (Kohlberg 1981, p. 369).

Kohlberg's mature view led him to an appreciation of levels of development that encompassed much more than cognitivism, achieving at higher levels of religious experience an intuitive grasp of objective morality in an experience of life that transcended subject-object dichotomies. In a word, Kohlberg, before his death, moved from a Piaget style concern with cognitive stages of moral reasoning in children and adolescents to a more holistic life span approach to moral choosing that realized the importance of the religious

dimension at least at the higher levels. Thus his theory, now outgrown mere cognitivism, is in need of a more holistic framework such as the Theory of Positive Disintegration to give it a coherent, multilevel appreciation of what goes on in moral choosing throughout the life span. But this is another and major study, and I have addressed it at length in another place (Hague 1987). Another of Kohlberg's mature statements relevant to our topic is the result of his relationship with Habermas. At the end of a massive chapter, entitled, "The Current Formulation of the Theory" in his "Psychology of Moral Development" (1948b) Kohlberg says: "We believe in line with Weber (1949), Habermas (1983) and others that objectivity is a 'moment' of scientific inquiry; that the essence or 'truth' value of objectivity does not reside in some reified, permanent or factual quality inherent in the object of inquiry, but is rather to be found in and understood as a process of understanding which is the changing relationship between the investigator and what he or she observes. We believe that it is this theoretical and methodological orientation aptly expressed by Habermas's notion of 'objective hermeneutics' that characterizes our work".

It is not surprising to find the presence of Habermas in this issue, given the widespread influence he has had, but it is more interesting and exciting to explore where the ideas of Kohlberg and Habermas in the context of multilevelness might take us. We will return to this.

Scholars have traditionally recoiled from the word "subjective" when talking of morals because it envisioned a rampant individualism, a rule by personal urge, or at best a rule by the great sweaty masses of the majority. But by looking at subjectivity at various levels of authenticity, we can, I think, propose a subjective approach to moral judgment-making that enriches the concept of objective hermeneutics. It also enriches that word "intuition" by giving it levels of meaning, permitting higher, more authentic levels of intuition.

Clearly I am building a case for moral judgment-making that pictures it not just as a series of cognitive stages stretching through childhood and adolescence, but one that usually finds its greater complexities and proliferation of levels in adult life, and its highest refinements in addressing the transcendent, religious, meaning-laden moral questions that permeate the higher levels of development. It takes time to develop from being a "subject" in the immediate world of unreflected sensations to becoming an authentic person in the adult world of meaning. It is a journey, not an arrival. There is no static state of perfection. Authenticity means a continuous asking questions of self and life, moving from immediate experience to understanding, and beyond understanding to reflection, and through reflection to judgment and, ultimately to questions of worthwhileness — questions of value. It is all process towards higher levels and entrance into that transcendent domain of ultimate meaning and metaethical questions of value where subject-object dualities disappear. Authenticity, at core, is a process and a function of what questions we ask of life.

### **MULTILEVELNESS IN KAZIMIERZ DĄBROWSKI'S THEORY**

Dąbrowski has mapped out some qualitative criteria of levels of concepts. These deserve demonstration here if we are to share understanding of levels of intuition.

In general, Dąbrowski's levels are distinguished by a movement from the automatic, and unreflected to the more voluntary and reflected upon. Each new structure is qualitatively different from the preceding. It is more complex, yet more integrated. Forces of self-direction and self-determination emerge, permitting transcendence of the biological life cycle. The movement is from inner experience determined by behaviour and external forces to behaviour determined by inner experience. Self direction, autonomy, authenticity are the

forces that give each new level a higher qualitative component.

Just as the presence of characteristic dynamism distinguished Dąbrowski's levels, so the active presence of these dynamisms in human activity indicates the level of that behaviour. Perhaps a glimpse at some of the dynamism most relevant to objective judgment-making would best serve our purposes here.

### **THE HIGHER LEVEL DYNAMISM OF OBJECTIVITY**

Besides the authenticity dynamism which Dąbrowski saw as operative at higher levels of development, he described another high level dynamism particularly relevant to our discussion of moral objectivity. It is the dynamism he called "subject-object in oneself"— an ability he ascribed to higher level persons to see others as subjects and oneself as an object. To my mind it is something much more than identification or role-taking which has long been explored in the psychology of morals. This dynamism includes not only the ability to stand in another person's shoes, sharing their subjective experience, but to stand outside oneself, to distanciate from oneself, to assume the unaccustomed role of seeing oneself as an object and to reflect upon that. The self-objectification will often be expressed in words or other affect-laden images allowing room for distanciation and the objectivity that comes from gaining perspective. Van Gogh's self portrait is as much a personal distanciation as is Hamlet's soliloquy. I have slipped the word "distanciation" in here, and you may be surprised by it as I was not too long ago. But it is a good word from epistemology and ties in nicely with what Dąbrowski was trying to say with his dynamism of subject-object in oneself. We are all experts at being subjects; the world of our own experience is immediate to us. Correspondingly, if we are not careful (full of care) we can easily become, even from childhood, experts at seeing others as objects. As Buber has pointed out, a humanizing relationship is not possible when, buried in one's own subjectivity, one treats others as objects. Dąbrowski challenges us to enter into the life space of the other and experience the world from their point of view, and, conversely, to step outside our own easy subjectivity, to view ourselves objectively.

Like an artist too close to his painting for too long a time, we need distance to give perspective. So we must psychologically constantly "step back". This is distanciation. It is, for example, the kind of distance from a concern that a client gets from talking with a counsellor. It is the kind of distance from one's own development that a person gets by putting it in words on paper in a personal journal. Dąbrowski and Piechowski (Dąbrowski & Piechowski 1977, p. 150) report an illustrative passage from a reflection of one of their subjects: "Thinking appears to me to be one-sided; it has lost somewhere its logical certainty. I am more uncertain and more hesitant, yet at the same time I find myself richer in my thoughts and feelings. Perhaps loss of certainty in thinking and its closer interdependence with feelings are really tied together with a greater complexity and depth of thinking as a way of knowing".

The image is affect-laden. Most often, as in this illustration, it is in words; sometimes it is in art or in the beauty of life lived reflectively. By imaging self in relationship to others, one gains distance, perspective and ultimately objective self understanding. On the other hand, by trying to interpret the affect-laden images of other words and actions we engage in hermeneutics, and one gains to some extent the other's subjectivity. We will return to this hermeneutical process toward the end of this paper when we address the practicalities of creating and communicating objective values. For now the concept of intuition will carry us along our way.

## **INTUITION AS A MULTILEVEL CONCEPT**

Looking at intuition from a multilevel perspective, (which as far as I know is something Dąbrowski himself did not do explicitly) we can see it is not something to be summarily dismissed as mere emotional whimsy. Nor, at the other extreme, as something always to be taken religiously as a kind of mystical certainty. At the lowest levels there are mere hunches, based on little experience and still less reflection.

Whim and fancy and gratification of instinctual drives are uppermost. These automatic, unreflected responses have frequently been identified with intuition, leaving the concept there in its lowest unilevel sense to be neglected. It is no wonder that intuition in this unilevel sense has been scorned as a source of moral objectivity. At the lowest level, intuition would not be built upon perspective, a sense of history, not even one's personal history, but, devoid of retrospection and propection, it would respond to the needs of the moment. One would be merely responding to one's instincts with little or no appreciation of or identification with another. Truly, perspective is missing at the lowest levels and objectivity a product of happenstance.

At a slightly higher level, one may be a little ambivalent about following personal "hunches". One begins to get doubts about the ethics: "If it feels good, do it". Fear of getting caught produces ambivalence. Conflict between moral actions and their consequences may be resolved by rationalizations or putting the blame "out there" — a kind of "the devil made me do it" attitude. Psychological or physical conflicts between one's intuitions force one to resort to rationalizations, or a giving up of autonomy in favour of the comfort and acceptance promised by following those in authority or those who have power. Some outside authority has the responsibility, whether it be a "religious" guru, a rigid interpretation of the Bible, or a President as we saw in the Watergate trials of a few years ago and are seeing currently in the Iranscam investigation.

At a still higher level, one will feel guilty about being so self-centred. Intuitions are inhibited by self doubt and feelings of inferiority. One wonders whether what one feels is right when subjected to the scrutiny of others, particularly if the others have social support for being more logical and coolly rational. The criteria of rightness have moved up the scale from mere power to respect for "rationality". An ethic of principle in the Kohlbergian sense may prevail, but a firm ethic of care and responsibility in a full appreciation of relatedness has not yet emerged. Positive maladjustment is difficult. One wonders if one can really trust one's intuitions.

At the next level, consciousness of one's own inner core of valuing becomes stronger and more certain. Feelings of inferiority toward others yield more to feelings of inferiority to one's own inner standards. Autonomy and an enhanced sense of responsibility emerge in an authentic subjectivity. The "ought" characteristics of previous levels, having moved far beyond neurotic tyranny, have become now a moral imperative to strive for one's own personality ideal, strongly fixed in relationships and bound by responsibility for others. This is the sense of moral certainty Maslow found in his self-actualizers.

At the highest levels, the centre of valuing, though based on an historical perspective, and an appreciation of societal mores, integrates a more autonomous, authentic subjectivity. It is the actualization of one's personality ideal — a value-laden dynamism. Beyond polarities, as in Kohlberg's Stage 7, persons at the highest level are grounded in an oneness with being.

Their acute taste and fineness of feeling for transcendent and moral reality give their words and actions a clearness of profile that lifts them above the crowd. Their devotion to relationships and a universal compassion may offend those devoted to narrower concepts of justice. These narrower concepts of justice see morality solely in terms of conflicts of rights, and tend to see relationships as exclusive rather than inclusive. A vision of universal brotherhood and sisterhood (and whatever is the combination of the two for which we as yet have no word) transcends petty politics. Eminent persons at this highest level are moral leaders — leaders who are sometimes followed by those who at some lower level can share their vision, and sometimes persecuted and put to death by those who do not know what is going on, or, on the other hand, know all too well what is going on and fear the moral power of it. At this highest level there is consistency between goals and intentions, between values and aims, between words and life lived. It is, in the Dąbrowskian paradigm, the epitome of authentic subjectivity.

### **AN ASIDE**

It seems, then, that the most promising approach in our search for the sources of an objective morality is to explore the higher levels of intuition, enhancing them by combining cognition, affect, imagination, reflection, the wisdom of experience and sensitivity in a context of care and responsibility. Central to this is Dąbrowski's dynamism of personality ideal. This dynamism is most active at the level of secondary integration, having at lower levels caused the individual to be troubled by the gap between what he is and what he "ought" to be. His personal moral striving is the effort to close this gap. Now "is" and "ought" are classical terms in moral philosophy, and for Dąbrowski to claim that at Secondary Integration the two merge in some way is to make a statement with powerful implications for moral philosophy. I would like to interpret it in this way: The closure is realized in eminent human beings by the identification to a higher degree between what is and what ought to be. What ought to be and what is have become almost one. This is authenticity at its highest levels. I have slipped in the words "almost one" when talking about "is" and "ought" in higher level persons. This is because, though I agree with Dąbrowski's statements that at Level "what ought to be becomes what is" as a poetic statement of high morality, I find it can be misunderstood. Sceptics are reluctant to accept this allusion to what seems to be a state of perfection. We are well aware of the shortcomings of eminent persons such as Gandhi. We are unwilling in a world clearly in a process to postulate something which may appear to be a static state of perfection. The Theory of Positive Disintegration needs an application of process thinking to Stage 5, and a further elaboration of the very highest levels of development. I suggest that more attention could be paid to the religious, mystical and unitary dimensions of this "ultimate" level of development.

I have, throughout, been emphasizing the highest levels of development, the most authentic subjectivity, because, in that transcendent realm is where the greatest objectivity is found, not because these eminent individuals have discovered objectivity "out there" in things. They have discovered its presence or absence in other people. Above all, they have constructed it in lives lived authentically. The subject-object duality is overcome in a personal oneness and an interpersonal oneness with others at the same high levels. There is, according to Dąbrowski, a remarkable convergence among eminent persons on their convictions of what is truly valuable and moral.

### **OBJECTIVE HERMENEUTICS**

Now it is obvious that there are not many Gandhis or Schweitzers around. Eminent people are few in number. But the rest of us at lower levels of development need to be mere passive

recipients of their moral teachings as in the tradition of the philosopher kings. In fact we lower level people are challenged also to construct moral objectivity.

If objectivity is a "moment of scientific enquiry" (Habermas) then moral objectivity is there in the "moment" of each Individual's search into not only the verbal teachings but the lives of eminent individuals. It is there to the degree or level of authenticity that each has attained. Objectivity then is not found in mere subjective feeling, nor in purely cognitive functioning nor in blind conformity to the majority nor in passive acceptance of the teachings of some moral authority. It is the "changing relationship between the investigator and what he or she observes". It is created where humanness and beauty and religion are created. It is created by human relationship. There the "text" to be interpreted is not only the words of a famous moral teacher, but the subject of hermeneutic perusal is also the life lived by that eminent person. The objectivity of this "moment" is a function of the authenticity of the teacher and the student, the observed and the observer, the "text" and the intuition of the moral "hermeneuticist". Traditional authority-centred approaches have depicted the "common man" as merely a recipient of moral teachings, passively receiving "truths" from an authority who, for some reason, knows better than he or she what should be done. The approach presented here, however, emphasizes the authenticity of the eminent person as the source of objectivity, but by stressing the hermeneutic relationship of the teacher and student, it demands a measure of authenticity at all levels of development. Ultimately, as with most things human, it is relationship and responsibility that guide humans intuitively to an objective morality.

### **POSTSCRIPT**

Besides the many other biases present in this paper, there is behind it all a whole set of value judgments — most important of which are the value judgments implicit in the term "higher level". Some will complain that I am using a circular argument, postulating that an objective value hierarchy can be arrived at by relating to the lives and teachings of eminent persons, while, all the time, the selection of who these eminent persons are is based upon a whole network or heterarchy of "accepted" values often only implicit. My reply to this is that the consensual validity we seem to have regarding which concrete persons exemplify the best of humanness may well be the most satisfactory foundation we can achieve as a ultimate base for moral judgments. Objectivity is objectivity; it is not certainty; nothing important in life is held together with the bands of certainty. But, as Plato appreciated, and Whitehead after him, the lives of the best human beings are held together by other "bands" — the lines of beauty, harmony and relationship. In that beauty is goodness to which, through fineness of feeling, individuals respond intuitively in accord with their level of development. But all this talk of beauty and goodness, and the religious dimension is another topic at another and deeper level. It is deserving of fuller development as an enrichment of Dabrowski's Theory — perhaps at the Fifth International Conference on the Theory of Positive Disintegration.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Dąbrowski K. (1968), "Higher Emotions and the Objectivity of Value Judgments", unpublished work, Edmonton
- Dąbrowski K., Piechowski M. (1977), "Theory of Levels of Emotional Development", New York
- Foot P. (1982), "Moral Relativism" (in): J. Meiland and M. Krausz, "Relativism, Cognitive and Moral", Notre Dame
- Hague W. (in print), "Toward a Holistic Psychology of Valuing, Counseling and Values"
- Kohlberg L. (1970), "The Ethical life, the Contemplative Life and Ultimate Religion - Notes

toward Stage 7", unpublished notes

Kohlberg L. (1974), "Education, Moral Development and Faith" (in:) Journal of Moral Education 4, pp. 5-16.

Kohlberg L. (1977), "The Implications of Moral Stages for Adult Education, Religious Education", pp. 183-201.

Kohlberg L. (1981), "The Philosophy of Moral Development", San Francisco

Kohlberg L., Candee D. (1984), "The Relationship of Moral Judgment to Moral Action", (in:)

Kurtines and Gewirtz, "Morality, Moral Behavior and Moral Development", New York

Kohlberg L. (1984), "The Psychology of Moral Development", New York

Lonergan B. (1974), "A Second Collection", Philadelphia

[Home](#)