

THE EMPIRICAL BASIS OF VALUATION

MICHAEL M. PIECHOWSKI

Department of Microbiology, University of Alberta

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

First International Conference On
The Theory of Positive Disintegration

August 26 - 30, 1970
at Laval University, Quebec

There are two frequently encountered reactions to the theory of positive disintegration. One is that to have the mental development outlined and mapped in a series of levels and successive steps makes it look like a program. The program suggests itself as worthy of pursuit because it points to higher values. Thus the achievement of higher values appears to be an obligation. In such an interpretation the theory looks moralistic and remarkably unattractive.

The second reaction concerns the nature of values. The theory of positive disintegration suggests that in the dynamics of human development values can be traced objectively--hence the conclusion that the nature of values and their existence, conceived independently from human existence, can be inferred from the theory.

The following discussion is presented to show that the theory of positive disintegration speaks only about the operation of values in mental development. The problem of the nature of values does not enter into the picture at all. It will be also argued that the outline of development given in the theory of positive disintegration does not make development predictable for each individual because it cannot provide the dimension of experience, as a study of the map of a country will not provide the experience of living in that country.

1. The heuristic importance of rare events.

Molecular genetics, a science which in recent years has given us unparalleled insights into the molecular basis of heredity,

has developed as a result of looking at very rare events of mutation and recombination. The rarity is often of the order of 1 in a million, or even 1 in a 100 million. These rare events allow us to study the normal working of hereditary processes.

In the study of human development the class of rare events is constituted by fully developed human individuals. They show the extent to which human development is possible, because in their case it has the greatest number of distinguishable stages. The stages of development fall into a sequence. The sequence appears to be irreversible to some extent. We find more individuals with shorter developmental sequences than the full one (i.e. missing the last steps), but that does not imply that the shortest sequences limited to the first stage alone are the most numerous. This is subject to direct empirical verification.

According to the theory of positive disintegration¹ there are five stages of development:

- I. Primitive (or primary) integration,
- II. Unilevel disintegration,
- III. Multilevel disintegration--spontaneous phase,
- IV. Multilevel disintegration--organized phase,
- V. Secondary integration.

By examining a human population one could assign each individual to one of the five stages of development. The

¹K. Dabrowski: O dezintegracji pozytywnej, PZWL, Warszawa 1964.

K. Dabrowski: Positive disintegration, Little, Brown and Company, Boston 1964.

assignment would follow determination of the prevalent stage because it is not difficult to observe that any developing individual can span three of these stages. As a result of such a study one could find out which of the five stages of development has, on the average, the most numerous membership.

2. The concept of function.

Function is a biological concept that cannot be deduced from structure or any other underlying physical information. A complex function can be reduced to simple functions (in most cases in biology to the units of heredity--the genes--responsible for coding the information which serves to make the instrument of a given function) but a simple function cannot be reduced to anything simpler than itself.

The theory of positive disintegration explains human development in terms of the development of mental functions. Each level of development is characterized by the operation of a set of mental functions. These functions are divided into two groups: spontaneous and autonomous. The autonomous ones operate on the basis of conscious choice. The ability to choose is recognized in neurophysiology as the distinguishing feature of purposive behavior, also called voluntary or deliberate behavior. Massive damage of frontal lobes causes loss of the ability to choose, because the ability to recognize, compare, and discriminate between alternatives is abolished. This is

described by Luria²:

A patient with a massive lesion of the frontal lobes very soon ceases to compare his performance of an action with his original plan and he can no longer determine whether the action in fact corresponds to the plan. Hence, such a patient, as a rule, does not rectify his mistakes and does not notice that his actions no longer conform to the original plan. As a result the actions of a patient with a frontal lobe lesion, although intact with regard to their motor composition, easily lose their selective, purposive character and are converted into uncontrollable stereotypes.

The mental function of discriminative choice in human development is called the third factor.¹ This function appears when the developing human being becomes conscious of his development and begins to make conscious choices. The third factor is then the function of conscious valuation.

The study of genetics shows that an organism cannot develop functions for which it has no genetic information. Neither can it develop a function if the expression of the genetic information corresponding to this function is blocked.

In the theory of positive disintegration the first factor of development is hereditary endowment. This endowment is the potential for mental growth. Since mental growth cannot proceed very far without the operation of autonomous mental functions, part of the hereditary endowment must contain the information necessary for the development of these functions. Hereditary defects like mental retardation, or constitutional psychopathy

²A.R. Luria: Human brain and psychological processes, p. 156, Harper and Row, New York 1966.

of the XYY³ type, are clearcut examples showing that autonomous mental functions are in some way controlled genetically.

Since these functions are very complex the underlying genetic basis must also be complex. For this reason it is difficult to decide a priori whether the absence of the third factor, and in consequence absence of conscious valuation, is a result of a loss of the corresponding genetic material or of a blockage in its expression. To be able to distinguish these two possibilities in practice is very important, because in one case there is no hope to promote development in a primitively integrated individual, while in the other case one could look for ways of removing the congenital block.

3. Biological determination vs. mental determination.

The theory of positive disintegration, being a theory of mental development, traces the appearance and increase in role of mental functions in the cycle of human life, it correlates these functions with biological functions, it shows the stages (levels) of development, and it correlates them with types of mental disturbance. The last point refers to the body of clinical data independent of the formulation of the theory.

Each stage (level) of development can be described by a characteristic expression of all recognizable instinctive and emotional functions like empathy, sexual behavior, attitudes of

³M.A. Telfer, D. Baker, G.R. Clark, and C.E. Richardson: Incidence of gross chromosomal errors among tall criminal american males, Science 159, 1249, 1968.

self-preservation, attitudes towards death, etc.

Independently of this functional and behavioral description each level of development may be also characterized by its own assortment of mental disturbances. Thus psychopathy points to primitive integration, paranoia or hypochondria to unilevel disintegration, failure psychoneurosis to spontaneous multilevel disintegration, depression or anxiety psychoneurosis to spontaneous or even organized multilevel disintegration. But mental disturbances are incompatible with the psyche of a fully developed person approaching secondary integration.

The mental development of man can be described as an increase in the role played by autonomous mental functions. This is the type of development which struggles to overcome the dominant role of biological drives and of physiological changes with the autonomous mental dynamisms of self-awareness, self-control and inner psychic transformation.⁴ It is the latter which can bring about, after much conscious and willing effort, a change of one's psychological type.

This developmental transition from biological determination to mental determination can be given a graphic expression (Figure 1). To simplify matters, we could say that a newborn infant or a very primitive individual, are both totally controlled by the dictates of biological impulses, and thus are 100 percent subject to

⁴K. Dabrowski: Le milieu psychique interne, Annales medico-psychologiques, Paris, t.2, 126^e annee, pp. 457-485, 1968.

biological determination, but a human being who can control mentally the functions of his body and its ageing process possesses 100 percent of mental determination.

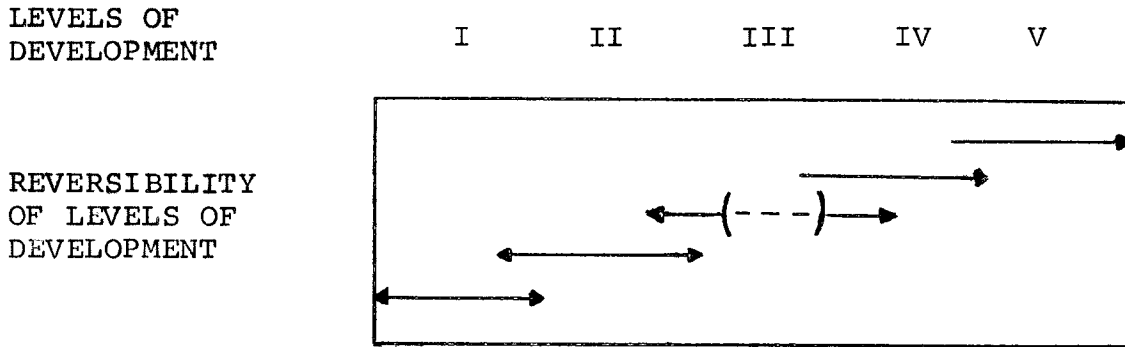
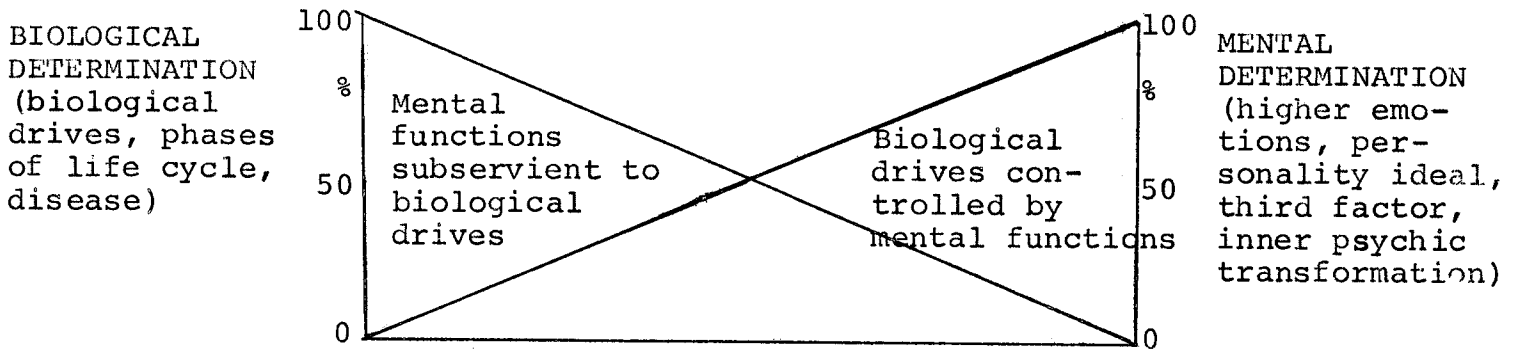


Figure 1

In the diagram, stages I and II of development have arrows in both directions to indicate that at the time when biological functions play a predominant role any higher level of development can easily be reversed to the lower level of primitive integration. It is only with the emergence of autonomous mental functions that attainment of higher levels becomes irreversible. One of these functions is the third factor.

One might postulate, before any extensive study is done, that stage III of development can be subdivided into lower, middle and upper phases. The upper phase, being a transition to stage IV of development, could be taken to be an already irreversible level of development, while the lower phase could be reversible. The indeterminate region where the switch from reversibility to irreversibility occurs would then belong to the middle phase.

At this stage we cannot determine the shape of curves in this diagram. Naturally they can follow any number of patterns. The important thing is to take into account both the biological and the mental components determining development and behavior. Environmental influence (the second factor in the theory) plays a role at all stages of development but it does not need to concern us here.

4. The concept of dynamization.

In section 2 we concerned ourselves with the organic basis of valuation. Carl Rogers on the basis of his life-long experience, also came to the conclusion that the development of the valuation process has an organismic basis.⁵ He pointed to the "possibility of universal human directions emerging from the experiencing of the human organism".

Now we shall look at the way values operate in mental development. The choices made through the third factor are not made on the basis of intellectual reasoning alone because then

⁵C.R. Rogers: Toward a modern approach to values: The valuing process in the mature person, J. Abnormal and Social Psychology, 68, pp. 160-167, 1964.

mental development would be a rational process that hardly anybody would consider worth pursuing--it would be entirely impersonal. The developmental choices must of necessity hold an attraction for the person who chooses them. The attraction comes from an irrational event, or process, of experience. The experience of value constitutes the discovery of value.

What is meant here is that the "moment of discovery" is an event, or process, through which one makes something his own--an organic part of one's mental structure. In this way a value becomes a dynamic force of development. This is the dynamization of something which was either known, or heard of, or perhaps perceived in imagination but that did not become an active force until the moment of experience, i.e. the moment of discovery. For instance one does not kill another man because of hate or craving for revenge, but one could wish his death. The discovery of the value of human life makes it impossible to entertain such wishes. The discovery of the sacredness of all life makes it impossible for some people to kill animals, even insects.

The concept of dynamization appears in the subject matter of the theory of positive disintegration very often, whenever certain contents of mental life become moving forces of development. We thus find the dynamization of the personality ideal, the dynamization of affective memory, the dynamization of a hierarchy of yet unrealized values so that it becomes a hierarchy of aims, and so on.

The concept of dynamization is a necessary one. It stresses the fact that the attraction of development lies in its unpredictability, since contents which are not experienced are not discovered, therefore are not activated as forces of development. It also stresses the fact that intellectual contents alone (high I.Q., ready memory, erudition, abstract thinking, etc.) are not the moving forces of mental development. And it points out that the experience of values is a clinically observable fact.

In the dualism of biological and mental determination the dynamization of values provides the energy for transcending the rigor of biological factors.

5. Levels of development as values.

The mental growth of man and the development of a hierarchy of values are two sides of the same process. According to the theory of positive disintegration there is a perception of values not yet attained, values that constitute a higher level of development. The higher level of development becomes then an aim of development.⁶ How are we to look at this without feeling that we are given a program of development, which from the philosophical point of view cannot be true or false, but may be wise or foolish, practical or impractical?⁷ This is even more poignant since it is stated that "the empirically established

⁶K. Dabrowski and M.M. Piechowski: Higher emotions and the objectivity of value judgments (in preparation).

⁷This was pointed out by Dr. A. Kawczak, for which I wish to thank him.

structure of the system of values acquires a normative character".⁶

The development of a human being, whether at the biological level or at the psychological level is the expression of an inner necessity. It is a process of sequential triggering. On the biological level it is the sequential expression of genetic information, on the psychological level, it is a sequential expression of the developmental potential as autonomous mental functions. The organism develops at the expense of food, the psyche develops at the expense of moments of experience. As one can compare digestion in different forms of life so one can compare inner psychic transformation in different people. It is the process of inner psychic transformation which leads from the discovery (experience) of value (this is the empirical process of erecting a hierarchy of value) to its eventual acceptance as a norm. A value becomes a norm not as a result of a decision or a learning process but as a result of the irreversibility of a developmental step. The dynamization of a value makes it impossible to subsequently ignore it, or forget it, unless a higher value is discovered. The corollary of this statement is that irreversibility, in the development of a hierarchy of values, is a test of their true, or apparent, dynamization.