

If There Are Only Two Choices

I witness

*the women who have stopped
revealing
in order to become
less vulnerable*

*they are cold
grey steel
or
pink-masked plastic*

*I would rather
take the chance*

foolish perhaps

*of saying too much
than speaking too
little
of feeling
too much than of*

*dying
by
small
frozen
beads of sweat
worked up from
protecting
all of myself*

*all of the time...if,
there are only two choices.*

Carolyn Read

"A Symbol Perfected in Death":

Etty Hillesum as Moral Exemplar

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ABSTRACT: A young Jewish Dutchwoman, Esther Hillesum, wrote diaries and letters from 1941 to 1943 that document a remarkable spiritual progression amid devastating circumstances. Intense emotional and intellectual growth crystallized in her free decision to work in the hospital of the transit camp Westerbork, the last stop on the way to Auschwitz. If one views Etty's diaries through the prism of Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of moral development, they show her progression through the confusion and maladjustment that characterize Dabrowski's Level III to her embodiment of her ideals in daily service that signifies her attainment of Level IV. Her letters from Westerbork illuminate how a human being might feel, think, and live at Level V.

Whatever we inherit from the fortunate

We have taken from the defeated

What they had to leave us—a symbol:

A symbol perfected in death.

T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," III, 192-195 (1943/1971, p. 57)

Introduction

Kazimierz Dabrowski, in his search for the raw data that might illuminate humans' painful acquisition of greater moral depth through the self-transcendence made possible by self-actualization, might have found one particular case of higher development extraordinary: the life of Etty

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Hillesum. A young Jewish Dutchwoman born in 1914, Esther Hillesum wrote diaries and letters from 1941 to 1943 that document a remarkable spiritual progression amid devastating circumstances.

Living in Amsterdam after the May 1940 Nazi occupation, Etty soon afterwards, in February 1941, met a 54-year-old German Jewish psychotherapist, Julius Spier. In the year and a half until Julius's natural but sudden death in September 1942 (on the day the Gestapo came for him), Etty successively became his client, secretary, lover, and intimate friend. Their complicated relationship nurtured the intense emotional and intellectual growth that crystallized in her free decision to work in the hospital of the transit camp Westerbork, the last stop for Dutch Jews on the way to Auschwitz.

Her diaries, published in English as *An Interrupted Life* in 1983, document the inner turmoil she had endured and resolved during her earlier life in Amsterdam. These notebooks survived the war and Etty herself because she gave them to a friend to safeguard. The diary that she continued to keep in Westerbork went with her to Auschwitz. Besides continuing her diary in Westerbork, Etty wrote over a hundred letters to friends while she worked there. *Letters from Westerbork*, the 1986 English translation, reveal an Etty freed from inner conflict. Something has transfigured the convoluted, contradictory Etty of the Amsterdam diaries into the astonishing writer of the Westerbork letters, a dramatically different woman.

From just before Julius's death until her own deportation from Westerbork with her parents and brother on 7 September 1943, Etty consoled and cared for many terrified inmates. Her job as a typist for the Jewish Council made her a privileged being not subject to internment at Westerbork. Not content with these duties, sardonic about the Jewish Council's role in obliterating its people, Etty chose instead to work at the camp that most others sought to escape. She used her pass as a Jewish Council typist to return to Amsterdam several times, but she refused to leave Westerbork or to take advantage of chances to escape transport to Poland. Finally, she left Westerbork with her family for Auschwitz, where she died on 30 November 1943. Had she survived another six weeks, Etty would have seen her thirtieth birthday.

Searching to explain how such a young woman could, in two-and-a-half years, develop such fortitude, I can only point to war, occupation, and genocide as factors that compressed and intensified growth that might otherwise have taken a lifetime. Writing, "We are but hollow vessels, washed through by history" (diaries, 14 June 1941, p. 24), Etty seemed to acknowledge these decisive pressures.

And yet, even if external circumstances did propel her forward, she proved herself their master. "I was able to feel the contours of these times with my fingertips," she wrote in Westerbork (diaries, 22 September 1942, p. 177). "...I read the signs of the times and they did not seem meaningless to me.... there among the barracks, full of hunted and persecuted people, I

found confirmation of my love of life." The very events that obliterated the will of so many others she surmounted by willing her voluntary participation; in the signs of the times that seemed meaningless to others, she found the meaning of her own life. She mastered what might have mastered her by choosing to master herself:

It is never external events, it is always the feeling inside me—depression, uncertainty or whatever—that lends these events their sad or menacing aspect....Generally the most ominous measures...have no power against my inner certainty and confidence and, once faced, lose much of their menace. (diaries, 12 June 1942, p. 118)

Although she, at the end, exhibited such serenity, Etty had by no means enjoyed this inner peace before, or even during, her affair with Julius. Her mysterious acquisition of this extraordinary inner peace during a time of great personal and political upheaval has led me to view Etty through the prism of Dabrowski's (1964) theory of moral development. His concept of positive disintegration as a necessary precursor to moral growth allows me to understand her gradual resolution of neurotic unhappiness as an integral part of her development.

Viewing individuals at Level I and Level II as having selves so ill-defined and weak as to preclude their comprehending or making higher-level moral choices, Dabrowski saw the neurotic conflicts of individuals at Level III as revealing their capacity for further moral development. They may or may not ever evolve further, but people at Level III feel dissatisfied and unhappy precisely because they possess a greater sensitivity. For them, the time is always out of joint. The moral crudity of our everyday world perpetually offends those attuned to higher moral standards. Their selves have developed enough to feel this offense, but not enough for them to internalize the ideals that they admire.

Resolution of their neurotic conflict—of the suffering that Dabrowski viewed as a "positive disintegration" of lower-level personality structures and defenses that impede further development—may strengthen the self so greatly that it no longer merely *admires* moral ideals but seeks to *live* them. The actualized self of Level IV can offer genuine empathy and selfless love; it does not cling to others as props or fear them as threats; others have become both less necessary to its existence and more valuable and valued in themselves. While the "selfless" actions of individuals at Level II, for example, primarily serve to bolster a shaky ego, the actualized person at Level IV can achieve genuine self-transcendence—precisely because the resolution of neurotic conflict has immensely strengthened the self.

Rarely, the person at Level IV evolves even further into the shadowy eminence of Level V: This individual has become so strong as to lose individual identity in a detached identification with humanity. Living *entirely* in service to their personality ideal, people at Level V realize a secondary integration of their selves. Their values do not conflict with their impulses or feelings; their profound experience of peace derives, not from a denial or

repression of conflict, but from a *genuine absence of inner turmoil*. The outer world cannot harm those whom self-conquest has rendered invulnerable.

Etty's diaries, viewed through Dabrowski's perspective on moral development, show her progression through the confusion and maladjustment that characterize Level III to her embodiment of her ideals in daily service that signifies her attainment of Level IV. Her letters from Westerbork illuminate how a human being may feel, think, and live free of inner conflict at Level V. Her ability to write of her departure for Auschwitz that "We left the camp singing" (letters, 7 September 1942, p. 146) ultimately derived from her once having complained of "a really bad fit of depression, an inescapable pressure in my skull and gloomy thoughts, much too gloomy to bear for long, and behind it all the emptiness of my quest" (diaries, 9 March 1941, p. 5).

"Mortal Fear in Every Fibre"

"Mortal fear in every fibre. Complete collapse. Lack of self-confidence. Aversion. Panic," she wrote in her diary on 10 November 1941 (diaries, p. 47), describing well the process of positive disintegration during which neurotic symptoms break up simpler personality structures to allow for deeper integration and more profound development. Etty's contradictory, entangled, confused, confusing diaries show her progression through the pain and maladjustment that characterize Level III—as well as her movement towards an extraordinary serenity. Most particularly, as the discussion below will show, they reveal how her affair with Julius both embodied and resolved her inner conflict between higher and lower strivings.

This sexually and mentally intense relationship that engaged Etty's intellectual and emotional overexcitabilities expressed her conflicts, exacerbated them, and finally resolved them. Julius excited her physically to a tormenting extent, threatening her equilibrium and both his and her resolve to remain faithful to others: "His mouth and body were so close this afternoon that I cannot get them out of my mind. And I don't want to have an affair with him, though things are fast moving in that direction. But *I don't want it*. His future wife is in London, lonely and waiting for him. And my own ties [to her elderly lover, Han] are very precious to me as well" (diaries, 19 March 1941, p. 13). Although the physical pull toward each other tugged at each of them powerfully, their love transcended the body, being in essence the love of kindred souls for each other, "a friendship whose roots take an ever-firmer hold on my restless heart" (diaries, 23 December 1941, p. 63).

Even more than that, besides offering Etty acceptance, understanding, and love, Julius enabled her to accept, understand, and love herself:

If I had to put in a nutshell what this year has meant... then I would say: greater awareness and hence easier access to my inner sources.... I listen in to myself, allow myself to be led, not by anything on the outside, but by what wells up from deep within. (diaries, 31 December 1941, p. 66)

Not only did he lead her to a deeper self-perception and acceptance, but he also enhanced her ability to view life with more insight and serenity:

It suddenly felt as if life in its thousand details, twists and turns had become perfectly clear and transparent. Just like a crystal-clear sea. You huddle in the corner on the floor in the room of the man you love and darn his socks and at the same time you are sitting by the shore of a mighty ocean so transparent that you can see the bottom. And that is an unforgettable experience. (diaries, 29 July 1942, p. 166)

Julius both upset her equilibrium and restored it by acting according to values that shrugged at the petty and ephemeral and emphasized the enduring and profound.

Nevertheless, Etty agonized as she struggled with the sensual and spiritual conflicts precipitated by her relationship with Julius. She did not always love or even like him: "His tremendous vitality can suddenly irritate me and frighten me, but that is probably what happens quite often when those who are sick come up against those in perfect health—they feel deprived" (diaries, 26 May 1942, p. 141).

Admitting, "I have never met anybody who had as much love, strength and unshakable self-confidence," she wrote in the same diary entry (9 September 1941),

I sometimes think I ought to be running to the ends of the earth to rid myself of him... he makes me feel ill.... Is it the enormous amount of love he bestows on such endless numbers of people and which I would far rather have all to myself? (diaries, pp. 39-40)

Deprived of his exclusive and jealous love (which he would not give her, but which would have temporarily soothed her neurotic self-doubts), irritated by feeling inferior, in this passage she both exalted Julius as a uniquely loving comforter of many people and noted that "he sometimes brings to mind the private life of a Roman emperor, I don't know why" (diaries, 9 September 1941, p. 40). Her ambivalence reflects both her perception of Julius's dubious aspects (a therapist who reads palms and literally wrestles with patients?) and her growing sense of his inner strength, his serenity, and his extraordinarily acute empathy for and intuitive sense of others.

She only gradually perceived his real gift to her, and only with much pain. And, as she resolved her struggles, she engaged in a concurrent affair with Han Wegerif, a 62-year-old man in whose house she lived. She never told Han about Julius. In an amusingly nonsensical passage, she confronted herself about her inner contradictions: "I am really faithful to [Julius], inwardly. And I am faithful to Han as well. I am faithful to everyone" (diaries, 9 December 1941, p. 59). Although Etty claimed to love both men spiritually, finding the physical incidental, she found it necessary to deceive Han and perhaps herself as well.

At this same time, Etty self-aborted a pregnancy without any apparent misgiving. "I assault myself with hot water and blood-curdling instruments, I shall fight patiently and relentlessly until you are once again returned to nothingness," she wrote (diaries, 10 December 1941, p. 60), "and then I shall have the knowledge that I have performed a good deed, that I have done the right thing." She referred to her brother Mischa's involuntary institutionalization during an apparent mental breakdown as her rationale for abortion: "My tainted family is riddled with hereditary [mental] disease...I swore to myself then that no such unhappy human being would ever spring from my womb" (diaries, p. 60). Mischa—like Etty and their brother Jaap, highly gifted and unusually accomplished—at this moment symbolized for Etty her self-rejection as a carrier of neurotic unhappiness. Her abortion seems like a rejection of herself as well as her fetus.

Other comments about her brothers and their parents underscore her alienation from her family. She wrote of a talk with Jaap, "We occasionally throw each other crumbs of information about ourselves, but I don't think we understand each other" (diaries, 24 October 1941, p. 47). To their father, she commented about Mischa, "I feel sorry for any woman who has anything to do with Mischa" (diaries, 13 August 1941, p. 34). And incessant marital warfare between the ill-matched Hillesum parents, Louis and Rebecca, also caused Etty to vacillate between impatience with and aversion toward her unhappy parents and more loving feelings towards them. Closer to her father, she expressed her intensely ambivalent affection for him:

My love for him is forced, spasmodic and so mixed with compassion that my heart almost breaks....there is much effusiveness and a desire to please so violent that each day of one of his visits once cost me a whole tube of aspirins....there is always that hunted feeling as well as the related wish that he wouldn't always bring his troubles to me. (diaries, 2 December 1941, p. 56)

A visit to the parental home brought out Etty's more pronounced dislike of her mother: "She wears you out with all her unsolved problems and her quickly changing moods; she is in a chaotic and pitiful state, which is reflected all about her in the utterly disorganized household" (diaries, 8 August 1941, p. 32). She later reflected, "I have an unresolved antipathy for my mother and that is precisely why I do the things I abhor in her" (diaries, 21 November 1941, p. 49).

Enduring her siblings' and parents' unhappiness, feeling an underlying affection for her father especially, yet resenting their demands and moods—Etty realized that she had the dual obligation to love them better and to free herself from their neuroticism:

(Downstairs they are screaming blue murder, with Father yelling, "Go, then!" and slamming the door....now I am suddenly crying since I am not all that objective really and no one can breathe properly in this house; all right, make the best of it then)....It is sheer hell in this house. I would

have to be quite a writer to describe it properly. Anyhow, I sprang from this chaos and it is my business to pull myself out of it. (diaries, 13 August 1941, p. 34)

In the midst of all this turmoil—a complicated erotic life, an unexpected and unwelcome pregnancy, and familial discord—Etty's relationship with Julius strengthened her to overcome her tendency toward egocentric and possessive love, to struggle for inner serenity, to become aware of her own immense strength, and to engage in a dialogue with God. Julius's profound regard for her and his example propelled her to struggle with her lower impulses, to prefer her higher values, and to evolve her own moral ideal.

Growing more aware that her desire to own Julius's exclusive love, as well as her hatred and jealousy of his other women friends, only imprisoned both her and him, only revealed her own lack of self-acceptance, Etty came to view love more impersonally:

We tend to forget that not only must we gain inner freedom from one another, but we must also leave the other free and abandon any fixed concept we may have of him in our imagination....Oh, to let someone you love go entirely free, to leave him to live his own life, is the most difficult thing there is in this world. (diaries, 2 December 1941 and 4 July 1942, pp. 54, 136-137)

Etty came to realize that no man's love, however exclusive, could heal her alienation from herself: "Woman always longs to lose herself in another. But that too is a fiction, albeit a beautiful one. There is no matching of lives. At least not for me" (diaries, 21 October 1941, p. 46). She also realized that she alone could assume the task of self-conquest: "It is a slow and painful process, this striving after true inner freedom," she acknowledged (diaries, p. 46). "Growing more and more certain that there is no help or assurance or refuge in others....You are always thrown back on your own resources. There is nothing else." With her acceptance of this responsibility for herself came, very gradually, a growing inner serenity: "All that matters now is the 'deep inner serenity for the sake of creation'....I do believe that it is possible to create...by simply molding one's inner life" (diaries, 25 March 1942, p. 87).

Her self-acceptance and inner serenity helped her discover her own strength. No longer would she succumb to the woman's temptation to project that inner quality onto a man. Julius's accepting, nonpossessive, affirming love helped her to find her own power. His strength strengthened her. Both of them eventually realized what had happened—what their love had created:

Suddenly he looked down at me from his heights—I was sitting on the floor, my head against his knees—with searching and tender eyes, and said, "The marvelous way you have grown." And later, "You are a fantastic girl." ...I have matured enough to assume my "destiny," to cease living an accidental life.... It is no longer a romantic dream or the thirst for adventure, or for love, all of which can drive you to commit mad

and irresponsible acts. No, it is a terrible, sacred, inner seriousness, difficult and at the same time inevitable. (diaries, 30 April 1942, p. 112)

Having written, "I know the intimate gestures he uses with women but I still want to know the gestures he uses with God" (diaries, 26 December 1941, p. 64), Etty eventually found her own gesture: kneeling on coconut matting in her rooms and praying that God would strengthen her as she engaged her destiny.

Living Out the Ideal

Clearly, side-by-side with Etty's more confused or questionable behaviors, a personality ideal was solidifying: an ideal that put genuine love for others and genuine responsibility for her own life at the forefront. Not only did she enunciate such higher-level ideals, but she began to dedicate her life to them to an extent to which few human beings ever feel obliged.

She had derived this ideal of service—of affirming, nonpossessive love and empathy—from Julius, but she made it her own. His sudden death from lung problems only confirmed her sense of destiny:

The best and the noblest part of my friend, of the man whose light You kindled in me, is now with You. What was left behind was a childish, worn-out husk in the two small rooms in which I experienced the greatest and deepest happiness of my life.... I had a thousand things to ask you and to learn from you [Julius]; now I will have to do everything by myself. But I feel so strong that I'm sure I'll manage. What energies I possess have been set free inside me. You taught me to speak the name of God without embarrassment. You were the mediator between God and me, and now you, the mediator, have gone and my path leads straight to God. It is right that it should be so. And I shall be the mediator for any other soul I can reach. (diaries, 15 September 1942, pp. 168, 169)

So strong did he leave her that she felt stronger than he, more able to bear what would come: "You, dear, spoilt man, would have been quite unable to bear that. I can bear it much better and even as I suffer I shall continue to live your life and pass it on" (diaries, 15 September 1942, p. 170).

Even before Julius's death, Etty had volunteered to serve at Westerbork; his passing only heightened her resolve. She observed the tragic spectacle there and at the Jewish Council with clear-sightedness. Threatened extermination, rather than creating a sense of dignity and moral seriousness, in many victims only fostered more intrigue, backbiting, viciousness, and insensitivity toward one another. Though Etty no longer needed these devices of the weak ego, she did not spare herself an ongoing self-examination:

And then again there are moments when life is dauntingly difficult. Then I am agitated and restless and tired all at once.... One must also accept

that one has "uncreative" moments. The more honestly one can accept that, the quicker these moments will pass. One must have the courage to call a halt, to feel empty and discouraged. (diaries, 12 October 1942, p. 195)

She had learned enough patience with and love for herself, enough task orientation, to forgo the egotistic necessity of always being perfect. She also clearly perceived the self-destructive and futile nature of the hatred felt by many of her fellow Jews for the Germans:

We have so much work to do on ourselves that we shouldn't even be thinking of hating our so-called enemies. We are hurtful enough to one another as it is.... Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace and to reflect it towards others. (diaries, 23 and 29 September 1942, pp. 179, 185)

While she accepted the moral task of self-transformation, this did not blind her to the profound misery created by the Nazis:

My acceptance is not indifference or helplessness. I feel deep moral indignation at a regime that treats human beings in such a way. But events have become too overwhelming and too demonic to be stemmed with personal resentment and bitterness. These responses strike me as being utterly childish and unequal to the fateful course of events. (diaries, 11 July 1942, p. 150)

She simply chose to see the response of hatred as only perpetuating the cycle of human evil. Rather than hate the Germans or escape them (she declined several chances to do so), Etty chose to comfort their victims:

People often get worked up when I say it doesn't really matter whether I go or somebody else does, the main thing is that so many thousands have to go.... I am only bowing to the inevitable and even as I do so I am sustained by the certain knowledge that ultimately they cannot rob us of anything that matters. But I don't think I would feel happy if I were exempted from what so many others have to suffer. (diaries, p. 150)

Her self-chosen destiny lay among those whom she could not abandon uncomforted.

Her choice of such a destiny almost as a gift underscored her inner freedom from external circumstance. Not only did the Nazis not force her in this choice, but she also felt herself free of them even in death. She did not need to react to them with humiliation, hate, or fear. Her self no longer required these defenses. In Westerbork, at Auschwitz, or elsewhere, she knew that she would confront suffering and death as human inevitabilities. She might as well confront them at Westerbork as at any other place. Not *where* but *how* mattered. She reminded herself of this human fate:

I have not been entirely honest with myself. I shall have to learn this lesson, too, and it will be the most difficult of all, "oh, God, to bear the

suffering you have imposed on me and not just the suffering I have chosen for myself." (diaries, 2 October 1942, p. 187)

And at Westerbork, she would bear, not only her own suffering, but the accumulated agony of many others.

"A Condition of Complete Simplicity"

While Etty's diaries show her acquisition of the task orientation characteristic of Level IV, they remain profoundly personal:

That grubby little pink comb, which I have seen [Julius] use to comb his thin hair for one and a half years, now lies in my briefcase among my most important papers, and how wild with grief I should be if I were ever to lose it! (diaries, 27 September 1942, p. 184)

She made her last diary entry on 11 December 1942, a few months after Julius's death: "We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds" (diaries, p. 196). Written in late November 1942 and in the succeeding months before her deportation to Poland the following September, her letters from Westerbork illuminate how a human being—acting as a balm for all wounds—may feel, think, and live at Level V.

Like the figures in Dante's *Paradiso*, the rare human beings who evolve even further than Level IV seem shadowy and mysterious to the rest of us. Not having evolved that far ourselves, we—like the pilgrim Dante—feel awed by the intrinsic difference we sense between us and them. Nevertheless, Dabrowski suggested certain characteristics that seemingly define individuals who attain Level V.

Having achieved true integration of their selves, they experience little or no inner turmoil. Their self-mastery also has freed them from the menace of outside threats. No longer subject to the necessity of fending off inner pain or outer enemies, individuals at Level V act *freely*. The instinctual gives way to the voluntary:

*The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion...
...both a new world*

*And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror.*

(T. S. Eliot, 1943/1971, p. 16; "Burnt Norton," II, 70-73, 76-78)

The strong self, no longer reflexively reacting to "the inner and the outer compulsion," lives in service to the ideal that it has chosen. So strong has the person become, that he or she can—without falsity or self-destruction—genuinely identify with humanity.

Etty exhibited these rare characteristics at Westerbork. If any theme dominates her musings, one theme does: that the Holocaust challenges the Jews to master themselves. They may survive physically, but the Nazis will have murdered them spiritually, if the victims allow hate to fester within them or fail to engage the existential questions:

If we fail to draw new meaning from the deep wells of our distress and despair, then it will not be enough....[The Jews'] armor of position, esteem and property has collapsed, and now they stand in the last shreds of their humanity. They exist in an empty space...which they must fill with whatever they can find within them—there is nothing else....Against every new outrage and every fresh horror, we shall put up one more piece of love and goodness, drawing strength from within ourselves. We may suffer, but we must not succumb. (letters, 18 December 1942 and 3 July 1943, pp. 31, 36, 77-78)

Despite all the neurotic unhappiness of her earlier life, Etty now exhibited little inner turmoil and felt invulnerable to outside forces:

The misery here is quite terrible; and yet, late at night when the day has slunk away into the depths behind me, I often walk with a spring in my step along the barbed wire. And then time and again, it soars straight from my heart...—the feeling that life is glorious and magnificent. (letters, 3 July 1943, p. 77)

Incredibly, she noted that "Life here hardly touches my deepest resources—physically, perhaps, you do decline a little, and sometimes you are infinitely sad—but fundamentally you keep growing stronger" (letters, 3 July 1943, p. 78). Internally integrated, free of inner conflict, invulnerable to the evil that surrounded her, Etty could now, in a freely chosen destiny, love more freely.

Her nurturance of the suffering inmates of Westerbork exemplified what she meant in writing, "One should be less and less concerned with the love object and more and more with love itself, if it is to be real love" (diaries, 30 April 1942, p. 109). Earlier, Julius had hurt her deeply by remarking one night, "I believe I am your stepping stone to a truly great love" (diaries, 9 September 1941, p. 41). Her then-possessive love of him had caused her to yearn for jealousy from him. Instead, his more mature love for her eventually freed her to love nonpossessively, selflessly, as she did at Westerbork. Liberated by his love for her, she had the strength to endure such a liberating love, and eventually surpassed Julius himself in her possession of inner strength.

While her voluntary hospital service itself testifies to the freely given love she now poured forth, Etty's transformed relationships with her parents and Mischa speak even more eloquently. Her family members had irritated, saddened, and oppressed her earlier. Now that they had joined her at Westerbork to await their transport to Auschwitz, she admired their refusal to complain, their attempts to trouble others as little as necessary, their

renewed attachment to each other, their dignified attempts to maintain their reading and personal neatness, their jokes, their courageous anticipation of their eventual fate. Love and empathy, greater tolerance and acceptance now governed her responses to those who had once maddened her.

The self-actualization that she had achieved by resolving the inner turmoil of Level III enabled Etty to live out her inner ideal at Westerbork. Further, it so strengthened her self that she could lose it in the self-transcendence of identifying with humanity, with the suffering masses whom employment by the Jewish Council had not exempted from extermination:

With a sharp pang, all of suffering mankind's nocturnal distress and loneliness passes now through my small heart....Nothing was alien to me, not one single expression of human sorrow. Everything seemed so familiar, as if I knew it all and had gone through it all before. People said to me, "You must have nerves of steel to stand up to it." I don't think I have nerves of steel, far from it, but I can certainly stand up to things. I am not afraid to look suffering straight in the eyes. And at the end of each day, there was always the feeling: I love people so much. (diaries, 24 September and 8 October, 1942, pp. 182, 192)

Losing her self, she found it. Simplifying her life, she enriched it immeasurably. "I believe I have gradually managed to attain the simplicity for which I have always longed," she wrote (diaries, 21 July 1942, p. 158). Surely she attained, if anyone ever has, the distillation of one's essence as a person that Eliot (1943/1971) called "A condition of complete simplicity/(Costing not less than everything)" (p. 59).

"Out of the Strong Came Forth Sweetness"

What shall we make of Etty's story? When I first read her diaries, I knew both that I liked and admired her enormously and that I did not understand her. I suspected that I would have to reread her diaries (and, when I later discovered them, her letters) many times before I would achieve any glimmer of real understanding. Now Dabrowski's concepts seem to me to explain coherently a sometimes incoherent story.

Did Etty destroy herself out of masochism or folly? Her self-transcendence does not seem false to me: Out of a heightened self-respect and self-reliance, out of a strengthened self, came her capacity for service and sacrifice: "out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judges 14:14). No victim of the Nazis, no victim of herself, she chose this destiny. If she died as a consequence, she had yet lived more intensely than most and had found more satisfaction.

Moral evolution, rather than creating bloodless paragons, creates a more profound, refined capacity to feel, think, and act. To me, Dabrowski's ideas center on how the individual discards defenses that impede growth by

enduring and resolving neurotic conflict and on how the strengthened self that then emerges develops an ever-greater capacity to engage life and to give to others. Self-transcendence fulfills, rather than betrays, the actualized self.

Gradually assuming responsibility for her own life and refining her capacity to love others, Etty achieved self-actualization by resolving her neurotic self-hate and internalizing her moral ideal. Herself actualized, she began to focus on her chosen task. She had freed herself enough from egotistical anxieties that she could freely, not compulsively, choose that task. Her self-transcendence fulfilled, not negated, her actualized self. Etty wrote near the beginning of her diary (diaries, 4 August 1941, p. 28), "We still have to be born as human beings, that is the great task that lies before us." Etty Hillesum gave birth to herself as a human being, to a vision of the possible human: Hers was not "an interrupted life," but one triumphantly fulfilled, "a symbol perfected in death."

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Note: Please see Volume 1 of Advanced Development for more information on Dabrowski's theory.

This is the way of peace, overcome evil with good and falsehood with truth and hatred with love. We plead for the establishment of a Peace Department, with a Secretary of Peace who accepts these Principles—and with all conflicts at home and abroad to be referred to this Peace Department.

(This was a petition carried on foot by Peace Pilgrim from Pasadena, California to Washington, D.C. on her first pilgrimage in 1953.)