

## Kazimierz Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration and the American Humanistic Psychology

*The author discusses the differences and similarities between Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration and the theories of the American Humanistic psychologists. All are personality growth theories; however, the philosophical assumptions underlying the theories differ. The Humanistic psychologists subscribe to eudaimonistic ethics of self-fulfillment and happiness, whereas Dabrowski follows the Existentialists and stresses the dignity of human beings. He stresses the suffering associated with the attainment of higher levels of spiritual development. Underlying these different views on the nature of human existence may be differing assumptions about the metaphysics of evil. Theologians have discussed the metaphysics of evil since the early days of the church as the problem of theodicy. This article suggests that the American Humanistic psychologists and Dabrowski implicitly followed different theodicies. This could account for the resistance to Dabrowski's theory in North America.*

THE AMERICAN HUMANISTIC psychologists became acquainted with the theory of positive disintegration relatively late, perhaps too late to be influenced by Dabrowski's thinking, and vice versa. Dabrowski was "discovered" and introduced to American readers of psychology by O. Hobart Mowrer. In his introduction to Dabrowski's (1967) book *Personality-Shaping Through Positive Disintegration*, Mowrer stated:

Not only is Dabrowski's conception of psychopathology highly unconventional and thus not likely to be grasped in its true light, but it is also couched in a somewhat technical language which the author, over the years, has evolved for his own purposes; it takes a little while for the uninitiated to make the necessary "translation" into more familiar terms and thought forms. (p. XII)

Mowrer, who is, to a degree, outside the mainstream of the American Humanistic psychology, was attracted to Dabrowski's theory because of the latter's concern with the moral problem of guilt and responsibility. As Mowrer has pointed out, American psychologists may encounter some difficulties in reading Dabrowski's works. These difficulties arise not only from differences in terminology but also from a somewhat different philosophical orientation. This article addresses this problem.

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## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DABROWSKI'S THEORY

The historical roots and antecedents of Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration differ somewhat from those of the American Humanistic ("Third Force") psychology. The former has developed in the intellectual climate of continental Europe. Its origins are in the French school of dynamic psychiatry of Pierre Janet and his followers, in Hughlings Jackson's theory of hierarchy of the nervous system functions, in the clinical teachings of Wilhelm Stekel, and in the theory of child development of Eduard Claparède. The American Humanistic psychology is a product of the American soil. The theory of positive disintegration has arisen in the clinical context of psychotherapy, mainly with juveniles, outside the academic forum where debates concerning theories of personality are conducted in North America. The theory also has evolved outside the tradition of experimental psychology, with its stress on the importance of scientific methodology, which, on this continent, has dominated the field of personality theory and research. Another factor is the influence of the Existentialist philosophy and of the philosophy of German Idealism on Dabrowski's thinking. Until recently, these philosophical currents were an unknown tradition in America. Similarly, to many continental Europeans who witnessed two devastating world wars followed by social upheaval and individual suffering, Dabrowski is more pessimistic with regard to the human fate than his American counterparts. Along with the Existentialists, Dabrowski puts a greater stress on the dignity of man rather than on his happiness.

These accidents of history have produced differences in conceptualization, with resulting difficulties in communication, between the followers of Dabrowski and the representatives of the mainstream of the American Humanistic psychology. The terms used to define similar concepts are different. There is also less emphasis in Dabrowski's theory on the overall logical coherence of the conceptual structure than is the case with more academically inclined American theories. In recent years, there have been some attempts to remedy these shortcomings (Dabrowski, Kawczak, & Piechowski, 1970; Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Piechowski, 1975). Also, empirical studies that have used objective data have supported the theory of positive disintegration. For instance, the conceptual framework of this theory has been applied to analyses of the self-actualization profile of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, a French poet and aviator, and of Eleanor Roosevelt (Piechowski, 1978; Piechowski & Tyska, 1982). Lastly, Lysy and Piechowski (1983) compared personality growth measures based on Jung's theory with those based on Dabrowski's.

Nevertheless, there is a basic convergence between the views of Dabrowski and those of the Americans (March & Colangelo, 1983). Both the positive disintegration theory and Humanistic psychology reject reduc-

tionism, which characterizes Behaviorism and the orthodox Freudianism. Both endeavor to explain complex human behavior, such as artistic creativity or religious experience, on its own level. Such an explanation may require the postulation of new principles, new laws, and the development of new research methods. Both Dabrowski and the Humanistic psychologists subscribe to a concept of the human being that differs from that of the behaviorists and, to a lesser extent, from that of the orthodox psychoanalysts.

### *The Theory of Positive Disintegration and the Concept of Human Nature*

Allport (1955) distinguished two traditional views on human nature. The first is the "Lockean" view, which assumes that the human mind is a *tabula rasa*, on which the impressions coming from the physical and social milieu are imprinted. Human beings are regarded as basically passive and as only reacting to external forces. They are molded by the external environment to which they become adapted by social learning. This view stresses the "average" person, stresses adjustment, and tends to regard behavior as being determined by past conditioning and learning. Allport calls the second view of human nature "Leibnizian." According to this view, human beings are active agents who initiate actions, and are not merely passive objects reacting to environmental forces. Human beings are the source of purposive acts that actualize their potential. Consequently, human behavior is not entirely determined by the past learning, but also by goals and purposes that lie in the future. Thus, human behavior is self-determined rather than externally determined. This distinction between the "Lockean" and the "Leibnizian" idea of human beings is almost identical to that made by Harré and Secord (1972) between a "mechanistic" and "anthropomorphic" model of people.

Both Dabrowski and the Humanistic psychologists accept the Leibnizian view of human beings, whereas Behaviorists subscribe to the Lockean one. The Freudian position is somewhere in the middle. According to Freudian theory, human behavior is shaped by internal biological forces that produce certain primitive urges and drives in the id. Human behavior is also shaped by external social forces that check and modify these primitive drives. The higher regions of mind, the ego and consciousness, tend to be passive and to react only to the organismic forces emanating from the id and to the external forces emanating from the social environment. The resulting behavior is a product of a compromise between these two kinds of forces. The Freudian model, therefore, has both the Lockean and the Leibnizian features. The id and the unconscious are Leibnizian, while consciousness and the ego are Lockean in character.

Two other diametrically opposing views of man are those of Hobbes (1946) and Rousseau (1962). According to the Hobbesian view, the natural homo sapiens is intrinsically bad, or animal-like. He becomes civilized and humanized only by society. Accordingly, society is the source of the higher levels of human behavior, the source of values and morals. In contrast, Rousseau, and before him, Locke, regarded the natural homo sapiens as intrinsically good, though corrupted by civilization. According to the Hobbesian view, there is a split, a discontinuity, between the natural order and the moral order. The roots of the former are in the physical world and nature, whereas the roots of the latter lie in the society. Rousseau, however, envisages a continuity between the natural and the moral orders. The latter emerges from the former. Therefore, moral values can be discovered in the natural order of the world. The Humanistic psychologists have tended to adopt Rousseau's view of human beings, whereas the Freudians and the Behaviorists adhere to the Hobbesian one. They maintain that the animal side of the human being is basically evil and must be suppressed by the society. Accordingly, only civilized humans, members of a society, are capable of moral feelings, of altruism, and of religious experience. The Humanistic psychologists, on the other hand, believe that the potentiality for these capacities exist, waiting to be actualized, in all human beings who are biological organisms. They probably can be only fully realized by a superior human being who enjoys perfect mental health, is creative, and who embodies the design for the "good life." Such a life realizes moral and esthetic values, which are the beacons guiding the personality towards its full actualization.

### *The Theory of Positive Disintegration and the Theories of Ethics*

According to the Humanistic psychologists, moral and esthetic values, which are at their most basic level identical with one another, exist objectively in the natural order to be discovered empirically. Thus, these psychologists subscribe quite explicitly to the ethical naturalism. Together with the Stoics of the Antiquity, they claim to be able to discover "what ought to be" in "what is." Consequently, they reject ethical subjectivism and cultural relativism. Further, they believe that positive mental health is identical to superior morality and the implementation of ethical and esthetic values. One could ask: How are values to be discovered, and how can the criteria of positive mental health be established? Maslow (1962) clearly spelled out the Humanistic psychologists' answer to this question, saying that values and the criteria for mental health can be discovered by observing superior, self-actualizing people. Full self-actualization is an ideal ap-

proached only by a few. It cannot be defined by averaging human characteristics and by using the "average human being" as a norm.

Other Humanistic psychologists, such as Carl Rogers (1961), have discovered the criteria for mental health and for valuation in the unfolding growth of individual personalities in the course of psychotherapy. The Humanistic psychologists tend to subscribe to *eudaimonistic* ethics of pursuit of happiness and goodness. The self-actualization leads to a state of happiness and well-being. The Humanistic psychologists equate this state with that of positive mental health and contrast it with the state of mental illness. Because mental illness is a negative condition involving absence of positive mental health, these psychologists are not interested in it. Instead, they are interested in the higher forms, and positive aspects, of human behavior, such as artistic creativity, mystical experiences, and altruism. They are interested in the "farther reaches" of human nature rather than in human deficiencies (Maslow, 1971).

#### *The Hierarchical Multilevelness in the Positive Disintegration Theory*

The views of Kazimierz Dabrowski on self-actualization and realization of personal values differ in important aspects from the views of American Humanistic psychologists. Dabrowski, similar to the "Third Force" (Humanistic) psychologists, is a personality growth theorist who believes that every human being has a propensity for personality development that aims at attaining higher levels of its integration and functioning. Dabrowski is a neo-Jacksonian, however, and he believes in the presence of discontinuous stages of this development. Similarly to Jackson, he maintains that the nervous system, and therefore the human personality, is characterized by a hierarchical organization of the levels of neuronal, or psychological, functional integration. One of these is always actively dominant. Before the dominance shifts there has to be a dissolution of the functions of the lower level, and vice versa from higher to lower levels.

Similar views on hierarchical organization of psychic functions were held by Pierre Janet (Ellenberger, 1970) and his student Henri Ey (1969). Janet maintained that human "tendencies" (instincts) were organized into three groups: lower, middle, and higher. These tendencies at different levels could come into conflict with one another. Ey has elaborated the theory of Jackson and that of Janet into the organo-dynamic system of psychiatry. He postulates a "dialectic" or "dynamic" process that is instrumental in evolutionary passage from the organic infrastructure to the psychic superstructure. Through the phylogenetic and ontogenetic development of the infrastructure a more complex psychic superstructure is produced that dialectically interacts with and controls the former. The laws governing the

organization of the superstructure are different from those of the organization of the infrastructure. The psychic superstructure evolves in the direction of enhancing its psychological features away from the purely physiological ones. Ey equates the Freudian unconscious and the "automatisme psychologique" of Pierre Janet with low and primitive levels of psychological organization. Consciousness represents to him the highest level of psychic integration.

Henri Ey, along with Henri Baruk and Jean Delay, have continued the tradition of the Janet school in French psychiatry. These authors as well as Pierre Janet and Hughlings Jackson have influenced Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration. His hierarchy of levels of personality integration from lower to higher—the primary integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, organized multilevel disintegration, and secondary integration—assumes a discontinuity of the personality growth (Dabrowski, 1964, 1967).

The primary integration is characterized by the absence of conflicts, of self-reflection, and of empathy. The individual is motivated by self-interest and oriented toward external standards.

The unilevel disintegration is characterized by ambivalence, ambivalence, and inferiority feelings. Conflicts are between psychic motives belonging to the same level of development.

The spontaneous multilevel disintegration is characterized by conflicts between motives belonging to different levels of development. A conflict between the ideal self and the actual self is prominent. The organized multilevel disintegration is characterized by a deliberate, self-guided shaping of one's personality growth toward the ideal of self-actualization and self-integration.

The secondary integration is characterized by the attainment of this ideal, and also by self-transcendence and self-dedication to humanity (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977).

The levels of personality integration that characterize different stages of personality development are qualitatively different, are controlled by different laws, and are guided by distinct sets of values. The discontinuity of stages of personality development in Dabrowski's theory bears an imprint of Jackson's thinking, and of the theorizing of the French school of Janet. The American personality growth theorists assume a smooth and continuous, rather than saltatory, development. Maslow (1954) is the only American theorist who has proposed a theory of motivation based on a hierarchy of needs. The lower needs are deficiency needs. They are aroused only as long as they are not satisfied, after which they become quiescent. The lowest in the hierarchy are physiological deficiency needs, such as hunger and thirst. Higher in the hierarchy come psychological deficiency needs such as the ones for safety and security; still higher come the needs for love and belongingness, and the need for self-esteem and the esteem of

others. At the top of the need hierarchy are growth needs, such as needs for knowledge, beauty, and creativity. The highest need is the need for self-actualization. The growth needs become active only after the deficiency needs are satisfied. These deficiency needs are associated with "coping" behavior, whereas the growth needs are related to "expressive" behavior. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, however, does not presuppose different levels of personality integration associated with qualitatively different stages of its development.

Dabrowski's views on this subject differ. According to him, an individual at the unilevel stage of personality disintegration is, in an important respect, a different person from the same individual at the organized multilevel stage of disintegration. At the unilevel stage the individual is passively actualizing his or her growth potential, which is determined by hereditary endowment and the influences of social milieu. In contrast, at the organized multilevel stage, the "third factor" is dominant, and the individual directs his or her own development by intentional "free choices." He or she actively shapes his or her destiny.

Using the Sartrean terminology, one could say that at the unilevel stage of personality disintegration "essence precedes existence," whereas at the organized multilevel stage "existence precedes essence." This distinction also differentiates the views of self-actualization espoused by the American Humanistic psychologists from those of the Existentialists. According to the former, the personality growth potential, if the environmental conditions are favorable, "actualizes itself," in the way an acorn in a fertile soil "actualizes" itself into becoming an oak tree. This view implies the Aristotelian concept of *entelechy*, a potency to develop the specific essence. On the other hand, according to the Existentialists, the human being creates his or her own personality and values by free choices and by acts of free will. According to the first view, essence precedes existence; according to the second, existence precedes essence.

Maslow (1962), in a chapter devoted to "what psychology can learn from Existentialists," in his book *Towards a Psychology of Being*, spelled out quite explicitly the difference between his views on self-actualization and those of the Existentialists. He stated:

The Europeans are stressing the self-making of the self in a way that the Americans don't. Both the Freudians and the *self actualization and growth theorists* [italics added] in this country talk more about *discovering* the self (as if it were there waiting to be found) and of *uncovering* therapy (shovel away the top layers and you'll see what has been always lying there, hidden). To say, however, that the self is a project and is *altogether* created by the continual choices of the person himself is an *extreme overstatement* [italics added] in view of what we know of, e.g., the constitutional and genetic determinants of personality. This clash of opinions is a problem that can be settled experimentally. (p. 12)

Dabrowski's views on self-actualization provide a compromise between the views of the American Humanistic psychologists and those of the Existen-

tialists. To repeat, he maintains that at lower levels of its development, personality self-actualization is determined by the inherited endowment, the growth potential, and the social milieu. At higher levels, however, the "third factor" takes over and the individual shapes his or her own development by intentional acts and free choices.

#### *Happiness and Mental Health in Dabrowski's Theory*

There is another important distinction between the theory of positive disintegration and the American Humanistic psychology. They differ in their views on the nature and purpose of human existence, on the human fate, and on the meaning of human suffering. The ethical system advocated by Humanistic psychologists, and implied in their concept of positive mental health, is *eudaimonistic*. It considers mental health, and by implication, morality, as being based on the quest for self-fulfillment, happiness, and "good." This is in contrast to ethics based on the quest for "right," dignity, and fulfillment of one's duty. *Eudaimonia*, the term coined by Aristotle in his *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, means self-fulfillment (i.e., the fulfillment of one's functions, associated with a state of happiness). *Eudaimonistic* ethics is, of course, not to be equated with *Hedonistic* ethics based on the pursuit of pleasure. Self-fulfillment may involve identification with, commitment, and even devotion to an altruistic cause. Nevertheless, it advocates the pursuit of one's happiness and well-being.

The meaning of human happiness is an important point of disagreement between the views of the Humanistic psychologists on the one hand, and the theory of positive disintegration and the views of the Existentialists on the other. There is a kind of Pollyannish optimism about the goodness of human nature and of the world, regarded as the best of all possible worlds, in the writings of the American Humanistic psychologists; this stems from the Rousseauan model of man adopted by them. To quote Maslow (1962) again:

I don't think we need take too seriously the European existentialists' exclusive harping on dread, on anguish, on despair and the like, for which their only remedy seems to be to keep a stiff upper lip. This high I.Q. [sic] whimpering on a cosmic scale occurs whenever an external source of values fails to work. They should have learned from the psychotherapists that the loss of illusions and the discovery of identity, though painful at first, can be ultimately exhilarating and strengthening. (p. 15)

This optimism is not shared by Dabrowski and the Existentialists.

An illustration of this emphasis on happiness and well-being may be taken from Maslow's theory of motivation. Maslow (1954) divided human motives into those of deficit (e.g., hunger and thirst), and those of growth, the most important of which is self-actualization. He maintained that the

motives of deficit have to be satisfied before the individual can start self-actualizing. This is contrary to the views of Existentialists such as Frankl (1963). Frankl found his personal meaning of life while he was in a state of extreme physical deprivation in a concentration camp. The same applies to an artist who creates great works of art while starving in a garret. The philosophical writings of Soren Kierkegaard are permeated with the ethos of gloom, misery, and suffering. This point has also been stressed by Dabrowski in his theory of positive disintegration. He maintains that higher and new personal values are forged through suffering and a disintegration of the previous satisfactory personality adjustment at a lower level.

The personality growth is a painful process. It is commonly described as psychoneurosis. It is also, however, a creative process that causes suffering but at the same time leads to higher levels of personal development. In addition, it is conducive to literary, artistic, and philosophical creativity as illustrated by such authors as Dostoyevski, Kafka, and Proust, such painters as Van Gogh and Toulouse Lautrec, and such philosophers as Descartes and Kierkegaard. Thus, for Dabrowski, psychoneurosis, mental illness, and suffering have a positive aspect. They have a potential for the realization of good. Mental health and mental illness are closely intertwined as two facets of the creative personality growth. For the American Humanistic psychologists, mental illness and mental health are poles apart. They are two opposite ends of a continuum stretching from the extreme ill health, a negative and undesirable state of affairs, to the perfect health, a positive and desirable state of affairs. According to these psychologists, mental illness is an absence of mental health, and, therefore, it is lacking in an independent reality.

The Humanistic psychologists are preoccupied with positive mental health and with the psychologically advantageous. They study outstanding and gifted people who display creativity and superior mental health, rather than people who are pathological, sick, and disadvantaged.

#### *The Theory of Positive Disintegration and the Metaphysics of Evil*

Both the theory of positive disintegration and Humanistic psychology see the problem of mental health as related to that of morality and ethics, and, by a further implication, to the metaphysics of good and evil. A superior mental health, or a high level of personality development, is associated with more refined morality and ethics. It is associated with the realization of good and abatement of evil. The role of evil and suffering implied by the theory of positive disintegration, however, is different from that implied by the theorizing of the Humanistic psychologists. The latter regard suffering and mental illness as indicating an absence of positive mental health,

as having no intrinsic meaning, and, therefore, as being somewhat unreal. Their views are similar to the ones adhered to by the Christian Scientists, who regard illness and suffering as an illusion, having no real basis. This difference of views on the role and the meaning of suffering may imply different metaphysical positions with regard to the meaning of good and evil that go back to the early history of the church.

The Patristic writers were concerned with the following question: Why does the omnipotent and infinitely benign God tolerate the existence of evil and suffering? If He cannot prevent it, He is not omnipotent. On the other hand, if He does not want to prevent it, He is not infinitely benign. This question has given rise to many theological disputes and speculations about the nature, purpose, and metaphysics of evil. The branch of theology that deals with this question and related problems is called *theodicy*. The views on the subject of evil, or *theodicies*, have ranged from that held by the Manichaeian heresy, which postulated a dualism of equally powerful forces of good and evil struggling against each other, to the views of Christian Science, which denies the reality of evil. A weaker form of the latter theodicy was proposed by St. Augustin (453-450 A.D.), who regarded evil as only a privation of good. St. Augustin developed his theodicy as a rebuttal of the Manichaeian heresy, and, in formulating his ideas, was probably influenced by the views of Plotinus on the nature of evil. Earlier fathers of the church, perhaps because they were inspired by the Book of Job, attributed a more positive role to evil and suffering. One example was St. Irenaeus (circa 120-202 A.D.), a Greek-speaking father of the church, who proposed a different theodicy from that of St. Augustin.

The theodicy implied by Dabrowski's theory is of the Irenaean type. According to this theodicy, human beings are imperfect, but perfectible. The world is a place of "soul-making," of trial and tribulation, where the higher potentialities of human personality can develop, leading to an attainment of a degree of freedom and autonomy. There is a purpose and meaning in suffering and pain; they are conducive to the creation of heroic human virtues. Suffering and pain provide occasions for moral choices and evoke such qualities as fortitude, courage, honesty, and loyalty. Thus, according to this view, there is an intrinsic meaning in suffering and evil. They have a potential for good. Both Dabrowski and the Existentialists imply this type of theodicy in their writings. To a certain degree, this theodicy could account for the resistance to both Existentialism and Dabrowski's theory in North America.

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**THE CLERGYPERSON AS COUNSELOR:  
AN INHERENT CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

(Homer M.L. Miller and Donald R. Atkinson)

IN THE EDITOR'S invitation to respond to Miller and Atkinson's article, *The Clergyperson as Counselor: An Inherent Conflict of Interest*, he implied I had expertise that would be useful. I'm flattered! As you will read, I do have some thoughts, or values, about counseling and those who counsel—both those identified as professional counselors and those who propose to counsel because of basic contact with a potential client stemming from other viable functions. The human being is a system (Miller, 1978), and as an open system there is interaction among all parts. An occupation can be seen as a system, and there is interaction among its various functions. Miller and Atkinson elaborate on potential conflicts that are inevitably present when the occupational system has many subsystems, or functions. The comments that follow have a broader application than to the clergy alone, but it is clear that such a person can be confronted with many value and ethical dilemmas.

An issue for people who have stake in the counseling profession is that of ethical practice (Farwell, 1974). Who are these people? They can be grouped in two categories—the purveyors of counseling services (interventions) and the users of these services. I think it is important to identify clearly what is meant by *counseling* and also what is meant by the concept *the work of the counselor*.

*Definitions*

In my conceptualization *counseling* is a *professional* relationship and process focusing on negotiated goals between the helper and a helpee that moves the helpee toward a positive, constructive, self-managed existence in view of the contingencies of the environment in which the individual operates. The *work of the counselor* includes many functions that feed both to and from the counseling function; group intervention, instruction, consultation, referral, program development and management, and evaluation are some of those functions.

Help comes in a variety of forms and for me the term *counseling* denotes professional help. Professional counseling is predicated on values, attitudes, knowledge, and skill. In reference to the Miller and Atkinson article, there is an ethical question as to the scope of professional preparation the clergyperson has for implementing the counseling function. The AACD and APA ethical principles implore counselors and psychologists to be professionally prepared and to appropriately represent themselves to the public. Do clergypersons, in their professional preparation, receive a substantive psycho-social-biophysiological base for understanding the many dimensions of human behavior? If a clergyperson is qualified in terms of professional standards for certification or licensure, then the "professional" dilemma is partially resolved. If the help being sought by a client is from a perception other than professional counseling, then the ethical question becomes one of proper identification of competency and the scope of behaviors that should be attended to by the clergyperson in implementing the "helper" functions. Does the clergyperson inform the client that he or she is not a professional counselor and set limits? What boundaries does the clergyperson place on the bids of clients for his or her help? As with all professional counselors, the clergyperson has an ethical responsibility to accurately self-appraise his or her knowledge, skill, and the situational variables (Fletcher,

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