

**Czesław Dziekanowski**

## **SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND THE THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION**

**Contents of Article: Basic Notions and Assumptions, Five Phases of Human Development, Conditions of Self-Actualization and the Conception of Man, Positive Disintegration and Freudian Psychoanalysis, Notes, Bibliography.**

"For centuries, and especially for the last decades, the notion of integration – the integration process – has been almost universally believed to express good organization, efficiency, subordination of parts to the whole, and – within psychic activities – positive conduct and the individual's health".

Kazimierz Dąbrowski

"My main objective is to present the benefits derived from renowned (not necessarily well-known) psychological and sociological conceptions in order to perceive mental disorders in a much broader context than so far".

Kazimierz Jankowski

"A good psychiatrist is not he who masters different psychotherapeutic methods and tricks, but he who – due to his contacts with the ill – gains better and better understanding of another man to enrich his own internal world of experience".

Antoni Kępiński

Among the three Polish representatives of humanistic psychiatry quoted above, who are particularly active in publishing their works, I shall focus here on the first one only. I realize, however, that their theories are alike in terms of the strong emphasis they put on resigning from painism in favour of psychic change. They all seek an approach that would allow them to get through to the patient (through their illness) as to a human being and to establish cooperation with him, whose primary goal is to enable their development of personality ideal, i.e. self-actualization. Each of the three conceptions is so crystallized that it provides its own insight – often quite original – not only into such an intimate sphere as a mental disorder but also into human nature in general. In this mode Kępiński writes: "A psychiatrist, as no other person perhaps, has a unique opportunity to get to know human nature. By doing so, he is getting to know his own nature better, which does not leave his personality unaffected" (Kępiński 1973, p. 263).

With regard to the aspect of self-actualization that is of interest to us, the Theory of Positive Disintegration deserves special attention. Firstly, it has been there longer than the rest – Kazimierz Dąbrowski worked out its bases even before the war (Dąbrowski 1937, p. 1-104) [1]. Secondly, it has not been analyzed methodologically (nor critically) in Poland yet, which, seemingly, the "disintegrated" text of the version of the theory in Polish creates "favourable" conditions for. Thirdly, within humanistic psychology Dąbrowski and his theory represent its new current, aiming at accepting positive aspects of the lack of psychic equilibrium [2]. Fourthly, Dąbrowski is one of the pioneers of this current, which many outstanding practitioners and theoreticians of humanistic psychology belong to at present [3]. Fifthly, the mere notion of positive disintegration ("in order for one to transcend from a lower into a higher level, one has to suffer a greater or smaller disruption of structures and primitive activities. This disorganisation, however, leads inevitably to «organizing oneself» at

a higher level – and this type of integration disorder is referred to as positive disintegration") include, more or less "strictly", the conditions one has to meet to reach the highest level of development, i.e. the personality ideal (Dąbrowski 1964, p. 38).

### **BASIC NOTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

The Theory of Positive Disintegration (Dąbrowski 1964, p. 38) is a theory of personality development: it deals with the questions of the structure, dynamics and evaluation of personality, doing so within the model of its development.

The conception of disintegration (Dąbrowski 1975a) has an assumption at its basis that the developmental instinct is a constitutive feature of every man. At first, we are all in an analogous position in this respect (Dąbrowski 1975b). The developmental instinct is to make us "conscious" of the necessity to develop. At the beginning of our life we do not possess personality – it is to be achieved, we develop, "earn" it. So, personality is believed to be a "final product", the end of man's evolution, reached through progress from instinctive, affective and cognitive structures and activities of the level of egocentrism – determined biologically and constitutionally – to the level of autonomy, consciousness and morality. The notion of mental and psychic development is based on the assumption that the personal reality, structures and activities are multilevel. In Dąbrowski's theory it does not mean just the acceptance of the idea that personal reality consists of several levels, but also recognizing some levels as superior (or inferior) to others (cf. Schutz 1962). The developmental model offered by this theory is not of "descending" (deterioration of or decrease in quality of functions on a continuum from man's birth to old age) but of "ascending" character, i.e. the development is characterized by constant progress of instinctive, affective and cognitive functions, as well as increasing independency of biological laws, personality of constitutional character and external influence. Because according to this theory man has one main task or goal – to develop, one is healthy only if he or she is actually developing, even though the development of human potential, as a rule, does not proceed smoothly, without ups and downs and periods of anxiety.

We can see, then, that personal development is closely associated with the notion of mental health, in accordance with which he is healthy who keeps developing, though the situation is paradoxical in that the actual health "requires" a (transitional) lack of equilibrium, i.e. disintegration, in order for one to be able to transcend from one level of psychological development to another. Due to the theory's main assumption – distinguishing many levels within the personal reality, the "ideological" force of positive disintegration in its fight against those psychiatric and psychological theories that favour adjusting to "what is" becomes evident. Since Dąbrowski does not believe that man is a "fruit" of his surroundings, that is his cultural environment, he "can" alter proportions within the so called major developmental factors (e.g. in relation to "deterministic" theories, for which the environment is the main indicator of development). According to him, developmental psychology has priority over such other factors as heredity and environment. It must be stressed from the every beginning that the autonomy factor (in fact represented by the "third factor", which is "like a synthesis of all autonomous forces") (Dąbrowski 1975a, p. 105) is based on psychic dynamisms of an individual which "fight" for an independency of constitutional typology and social influences. The level of this autonomy is directly proportional to the level of the individual's consciousness of it. Thus, the notion of development, in principle, refers to a transition from a homogeneous, undifferentiated, impulsive level that is determined by biological and environmental factors, barely conscious to a conscious, autonomous level of developmental self-reliance.

What changes here is not just the perception of the "share" of particular developmental factors, but of their value too. In this theory, Dąbrowski resigns from the conviction that it is the subjective factor in this sphere that decides whether something is or is not a value. According to him, values of people with the highest level of self-actualization achieve "special citizenship", gaining the force of objective and normative values. These "peak" values should apply to, or oblige, the rest of humanity [4]. By joining in to them, others would necessarily, as it were, step on the way of fulfillment. An observation, put forward evocatively by one of the theory's commentators, Aurèle St.-Yves [5], who sought similarities between some of the notions in the Theory of Positive Disintegration and gnosticism, springs to mind. The professor of social psychology at Université Laval notices the parallels between the following different or even opposite notions: the divine spark and developmental potential in the conception of man, negation of the world and self-control, self-cognition and therapy through diagnosis, gaining immortality by the soul and Dąbrowski's notion of development, especially when it comes to dualism and transcendence. Dualism in gnosticism is matter-hatred and aspiration to what is divine, so that there is the whole rejected and spurned world on the one side, and the divine, charming and appealing world on the other side. Dualism is in fact a difference between a better and a worse world, i.e. a faith in the transcendence of the sensual world. Aurèle St.-Yves writes simply: "Dualism is also a central notion of Dąbrowski's theory. It manifests itself in coming down in favour of higher rather than lower values. The notion of transcendence is linked with it. At first, we deal with transcending the biological cycle, i.e. surpassing the borders of the human race in the course of accelerated development" (St.-Yves 1977, p. 146). Then he quotes how this question was presented in "Le dynamisme des concepts": "It (transcendence) is about a progressive release from the biological cycle and about the evolution of actual and autonomous structures and psychic activities, as well as about development of one or several disposing and directing centres at a higher level, where they are independent of the biological cycle" (Dąbrowski 1972b, p. 124) [6]. Next, Aurèle St.-Yves points out that the transcendence of the psychological type consists of surpassing one's species and temperament: "Surpassing the psychological type means gaining traits and psychic attitudes different from or even opposite to those determined by hereditary potential" (Dąbrowski 1972b, p. 127).

After a close look at the developmental potential, it will turn out that this is what determines the scope and type of the development available to a given individual and what enables marking the boundaries of an individual's development. The bigger it is, the higher the level of development an individual can reach. The main form of the developmental potential is expressed by one of the five types of overexcitability. The psychomotor one expresses itself in the hyperactivity of all the types, a need for mobility and motor expression, constant excitement. The sensual overexcitability finds its expression in increased sensual excitability (visual, tactile, aural, olfactory and gustatory) and in the need and search for sensual experience and physical contact. The emotional overexcitability is expressed by increased emotional excitability, intense emotional reactions, as well as the need for exceptional and "deep" emotional relations. The imaginational overexcitability means rich abundance and vividness of images and sensations, very strong interest in the world of fantasy, art and supernatural world, as well as unrealistic attitude towards life. (Individuals with outstanding imaginational overexcitability are in general artists characterised by an abundance of ideas and plans). Finally, the intellectual overexcitability manifests itself in an inquiring attitude to reality, dominance of theoretical over practical thinking, sensible and objective rather than emotional conduct. If all of the forms of increased excitability (and especially the last three) are present, the developmental potential

is considered strong and rich.

Increased psychic excitability (meaning enhanced, i.e. more than average, responsiveness and excitability to internal and external stimuli), special talents or interests, and the autonomous factor (consisting of dynamisms fighting for an independency of social influences and constitutional typology) determine, in total, the given individual's developmental potential. However, rarely do we encounter individuals with all significant structures and activities developed equally in all cognitive, emotional, instinctive, aesthetic and moral spheres. Instead of accelerated or multilevel, let alone ideal, human development reaching the level of secondary integration, which Dąbrowski's published works, in principle, fail to give an example of, we are able to meet individuals developing one-sidedly, which results from cultivating talents or stimulating particular interests while others remain undeveloped; also, and most often, these are "cases" of normal development. In case of the latter, there is no attempt (or even longing for or dreaming of) whatsoever at ideal development, which in the Theory of Positive Disintegration is symbolised by evolution from unconsciousness or partial consciousness towards consciousness, from egocentrism towards focusing on others, from biological and environmental determinism towards autonomy and a broadened horizon of reality. That is because the "normal" ones' instinctive and affective functions will not surpass the biological cycle or their psychological typology.

#### **FIVE PHASES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Within the Theory of Positive Disintegration Dąbrowski distinguishes between five phases of development: 1) primary integration, 2) unilevel disintegration, 3) spontaneous multilevel disintegration, 4) organised multilevel disintegration, and 5) secondary integration or "personality". The basic assumption of the theory is that transition from one phase to the next (the phases in the process of mental and psychic development are hierarchical) does not proceed without obstacles, i.e. crises, psychic adriftness, external and internal conflicts, depressions and other psychoneurotic symptoms, as well as the disintegration of the hitherto ways of behaviour.

The extreme phases, 1) and 5), are characterised by an integration and organisation of the personality - at the lowest level - of impulsive instincts, determined constitutionally and biologically, while at the highest level - of conscious functioning, determined by the individual's will, at which he realizes personal ideals and values. Primary integration is the level of the lowest enhanced excitability, which is manifested in primitive attitudes and psychopathic behaviour (this type of overexcitability can be found in people who are always self-confident and treat others like objects or means to satisfy their sensual or psychomotor needs). In this phase, no internal conflicts occur, but external ones are numerous, though often masked with playing up to others, submissiveness or a calculated escape. Egotism, narrow-mindedness and rigidity of attitudes, personal ambitions, uncritical and uncontrolled attitude towards oneself are manifested here. The whole psychic milieu takes on a homogeneous character of biological instincts and is steered by them. An individual who stopped at this level is characterised by mental stiffness, weak or non-existent empathy and limited talents. This state, in which the psychopaths and the retarded are in, virtually lacks conflicts.

Secondary integration, similarly, is characterised by the lack of external conflicts. The inner psychic milieu becomes dense and cohesive, forming a harmonious structure of the best developed level, which is no longer disturbed or disrupted by "lower" level presence or actions. Almost all dynamisms are identified with the personality and its two essences: the

individual and the universal or social one. The main dynamisms of this level are empathy, autonomy, authenticity and a very strong sense of responsibility. This level is, so to speak, "peaceful" in its principal aspects, and it is just the dynamism of the personality ideal that is full of tension, activity and realizations. The personality ideal is constantly being verified and is dynamic in character, whereas the two essences are always present. In this phase the individual experiences himself and the environment in an utterly autonomous (selective with regards to external and internal stimuli, with one's own system of values as the drive), authentic (in agreement with one's own personality ideal), empathic (characterised by compassion and active helpfulness and kindness) and responsible (with a sense of responsibility for oneself and others) way.

Secondary integration is a level at which the individual's attitudes to oneself and others are realised as ones of the highest quality and the greatest consciousness. It is a level of universal development: in all the intellectual, social, emotional, impulsive and mystical spheres. This phase is extremely rich, based on multilateral experiences in the process of positive disintegration during which one's positive developmental potential is fully realised. An individual at this level is fulfilled, self-actualised and realised. At this highest "personality-generating" level, a multilevel, revived and refreshed personality is formed which is an organised, harmonious and firm, durable and strong structure, although at the same time the individual, now characterised by a deep insight into oneself, keeps self-perfecting inwardly, since he or she knows that the development process is not yet finished.

The transitional phases - 2), 3), 4) - are the levels of disintegration, where this disintegration can be either unilevel or multilevel. In the phase of unilevel disintegration, an individual experiences disorders of his or her own internal nature. Disintegration of the unity of actions and a lack of orientation can be noticed, which is a result of the undifferentiated fragmentation of the hitherto cohesive structure of primary disintegration. An individual becomes worried and their pleasant feeling is disturbed. The whole of their psyche enters a state of conflict between two or more values. However, the conflicts are "horizontal" — what clashes are drives and aspirations situated at the same level, and the hierarchy of values, which would make it possible to distinguish between important and unimportant features, is not activated. The individual keeps being stuck in a difficult and tension-generating position. This is because their internal conflicts arise from a fight: attempts at reaching his goals or satisfying numerous drives which, from the individual's point of view, are of equal importance and intensity. The individual is, so to speak, caught in the crossfire of an internal battle.

States of unbalance, contradictory attitudes and mutually exclusive reactions — ambivalences and ambitemperencies— are characteristic for unilevel disintegration. It is a conflict situation, since the drives or divergent goals cannot be satisfied or reached simultaneously. In order to keep or restore even the slightest level of equilibrium, one has to make a choice — one goal has to yield to another. Or this dynamism can accidentally provoke establishing a hierarchy of values. However, until this happens the individual is characterised, for instance, by an increased psychomotor excitability. He will get excited and depressed at the same time, which will find its expression in his will to satisfy his desires, accompanied by a simultaneous resistance to this will. A sensuous, sensually overexcited person will be pushed and pulled by sensual stimuli. In case of emotional overexcitability, the person will love and hate at the same time. A similar mechanism will work for those with imaginal or intellectual overexcitabilities. All those internal ambivalencies — conflicts — are developmental indicators of reaching a higher level of increased excitability, since they

lead to mitigating one's egoism and self-righteousness that are so characteristic of the primitive overexcitability. In any case, the accompanying tension creates a state of disequilibrium that is to ease the rigid biological integration.

The individual at this level is characterised by dependency on external circumstances. Their conflicts and states of a considerably upset psychic balance have little chance for a hierarchical solution. Not infrequently does this situation lead to a "unilevel" type of psychoneurosis that does not recognize the hierarchy of values, or to psychosis and suicidal tendencies. These states are often accompanied by certain anticipation and a perspective of new values emerging that would help the individual escape this difficult, tension-generating situation. Although in practice, distinguishing between the two phases is extremely difficult, what makes the distinction between primary integration and unilevel disintegration easier to make is the observation that just one drive dominates the former, whereas in the latter it is restrained by another drive of equal intensity and identical force. So, to give an example, meanness or greed will be held back by the fear of losing the money one has saved or of illness, such as excessive obesity, which, in turn, will lead to tempering the primary drives.

As the disintegration progresses and gains a broader meaning and deeper influence, the individual reaches multilevel undirected (spontaneous) disintegration. In this phase the conflict he experiences is not just between two or more values but between two or more hierarchies of values. The expression "multilevel" refers to the fact that the distinctive feature of this disintegration is the start of a creation of the hierarchy of values and multilevel internal conflicts, while the expression "spontaneous" indicates that it is not yet possible to recognize any specific system or organisation of what is going on. Multilevel disintegration indicates a psychic milieu of hierarchical structure: some traits are highly assessed, while others are considered undesired. The internal conflicts which hitherto lacked experience in the moral sphere (horizontal or unilevel ambivalencies and ambitendencies) spontaneously transform into moral conflicts (into vertical or multilevel ambivalencies and ambitendencies). At first the diversifying of values, traits and affective experiences is a changing, thus spontaneous and more or less unconscious phenomenon. The higher levels are yet to be established, and the individual's behaviour is characterised by knowledge of what is morally right more than by a particular realization.

At this developmental level the individual will experience two ambivalent tendencies in himself. The first will be to satisfy his basic instincts in a more or less egoistic way. The second will be to live in agreement with moral principles of telling the truth, acting with respect to human dignity, taking responsibility for his words and actions. When the first tendency prevails, the moral conflicts will be less severe, since the increased primitive excitability (either sensual or psychomotor) will come out on top and act in a more integrated manner. This state will not last long though.

At this level the dynamisms of positive disintegration are already present: amazement over oneself, concern over oneself (it expresses one's increased sense of responsibility for one's own development and it does not — as is the case with the amazement over oneself — express irritation over the primary self-preservation instinct), feeling of shame at and dissatisfaction with oneself, sense of guilt, and of inferiority to oneself, positive maladaptation that enhances the development and is similar to a need to address not what "is" but to what "ought to be", experiencing the process of "subject-object" in oneself, and finally the creative instinct. Thus, the spontaneous reactions of enhanced emotional, imaginal and intellectual overexcitability allow one to overcome the first tendency and

bring one to a state of constant maladaptation to all that is "inferior". They allow one to enter the path of searching for the personality ideal in oneself and the environment. But as long as the individual remains at this spontaneous level, he experiences "numerous" disorders: psychoneuroses or even more advanced forms of psychoses. However, unlike in the previous phase, the "spontaneously disintegrated" person will be prone to feel responsible for all of his failures, his conflicts with the environment included. Such an attitude will, in result, bring in more conciliatory behaviour, but will increase anxiety, depression and the experience of moral values.

In the phase of multilevel disintegration (self-directed, organised) a hierarchy of values is being established in a systematic and conscious way. While in the "spontaneous" phase an individual experiences a conflict between two or more orders of values, now the conflict is brought by himself, so there is no surrender to it. At this level the enhanced excitability triggers a process of restoring integration, but in a positive sense, which means that in terms of experiencing himself, an individual with increased excitability senses his cohesiveness and coherence more and more distinctly. He stands out from the environment more and more noticeably and perceives his identity as independent in time: past experience of his own meets with the present one to constitute a whole together. Very high reflectiveness is observed — after realising what is higher, better, more important and authentic, an individual is by now able to extract his own personality ideal, which shall be constituted by an increasing number of more and more attractive psychological features.

The individual will start to identify himself with these endearing and more and more distinctly displayed features to gradually, through this identification, be able to separate in himself "what is himself to a smaller degree", i.e. what does not seem to harmonize with his personality ideal, from "what is", "what can be himself to a greater degree". This process is made possible by a distinctly human capacity, referred to as the "third factor" in Dąbrowski's theory. It is a dynamism that together with, or rather despite, the hereditary and constitutional endowment (the first factor) and the environment (the second factor) determines the direction, quality and intensity of human development. The third factor allows the individual to eliminate the undesired aspects of their development both in terms of biology (what is inborn, inherited) and in terms of the influence of the external environment (family and society). The higher the level of development, the bigger the role of this factor. It expresses our attitude (positive or negative) to the influence of internal and external stimuli. In most general terms, it can be described as a dynamism of constant, continuous choice. This new element, a primary one in the series of the factors deciding about our development, can also be understood as a certain spiritual strength that at this stage manifests itself through negation and rejection of some of the functions and psychic structures that are not in agreement with the ideal and through accepting and perfecting the desired ones (through self-education).

Aiming at the distinct personality ideal, the individual takes measures necessary for its realization in this phase. They are connected with the environment, the external world. As far as experiencing this environment is concerned, reintegrating the increased psychic excitability contributes to deeper insight into and more harmonious relations with others, which is the result of greater self-awareness and the ongoing change of oneself through self-education. It is expressed in syntony (of a conscious character, unlike the one at the level of primary integration), identification (again, conscious, deep and constant), empathy (active kindness not only to family and friends, but to the whole of mankind). In this phase, the individual never acts in an accidental or ill-considered way. This is because he "bears" a

special kind of responsibility: it is the individual who determines the hierarchy of the main dynamisms, partly described above, such as: "subject-object" in oneself, "the third factor", dynamisms of strong empathy and awareness, of self-education and autopsychotherapy, disposing and directing centre at a higher level. The individual's behaviour becomes more and more homogeneous, thus preparing a gradual disappearance of internal conflicts and tensions that accompany them. But as long as the individual is in the fourth phase, he is not entirely free of them. He still experiences internal conflicts in the form of a fight against functions and psychic structures he does not accept, although defense mechanisms (delusion, denial) that are characteristic of unilevel (and to a degree of spontaneous multilevel) disintegration are no longer applied.

On the contrary, the fight gives his life meaning and brings him joy, since it is the source of the individual's realization and self-perfection. External conflicts, on the other hand, find their expression in maladjustment, which is not aimed at people as such though, but "strike" some of their attitudes and ways of reacting. Nevertheless, the two types of conflicts lead to external tensions that cause anxiety states, depression and obsession. They can, in general, manifest themselves in psychoneurosis, but not the one of existential type, since it is sympathy with the suffering of all of mankind rather than with ones' individual, "egoistic" fear of death that will be reflected in it. This is because the individual is already "within a stone's throw" from "personality". However, we "do know" this phase of human development.

### **CONDITIONS OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND THE CONCEPTION OF MAN**

There are two types of typologies in Dąbrowski's theory. The first one covers the five levels of individual development described above, while the other one concerns categories of the inner psychic milieu. Each of the developmental levels (except the first one) [7] is "ascribed" a different level of the inner psychic milieu. Thus, we have a unilevel inner psychic milieu, an inner psychic milieu that illustrates the multilevel spontaneous disintegration and so on. Each of them has its unique characteristics. The inner psychic milieu is a system everyone has that is composed of functions and psychic dynamisms which influence and oppose each other (Dąbrowski K., Granger L. /Eds./ 1977, p. 97). This notion is strongly associated with the Theory of Positive Disintegration, and its author believes that accepting it in psychology can be a first step on the way to accelerate the humanization process, since the appearance of the inner psychic milieu leads to an increased sense of responsibility for oneself and for dividing the inner "I" into the one "that is" and the one that "ought to be". It is "a system of the individuals' internal tendencies or dynamisms, i.e. of unilevel or multilevel, hierarchical or equal, developmental or antidevelopmental dynamisms, ones that are in agreement or in conflict" (Dąbrowski 1975b, p. 11).

The complex and multifaceted inner psychic milieu illustrates the fact that one's internal life becomes more important than one's actions in the mundane world, that authentic and autonomous dynamisms (subject-object in oneself, the third factor, knowledge of oneself and others at a higher level, conscious identification with oneself, individual and social essences) assume significance. The five, or rather four "levels" of it were mentioned in the section "Five Phases of Human Development". What is yet to be discussed though is the close relationship between "the conditions of self-actualization" and "the conception man". To do so, we have to, once again, refer to some apt observations Aurèle St.-Yves made while comparing the conception of man in gnosticism with the one that underlies the Theory of Positive Disintegration.

Gnosticism offers the following typology. Man is composed of three elements: the body, soul and spirit. Depending on which element prevails, man will belong to one of the three types. "Hylics" have the bodily, material, sensual element predominating, so salvation is not possible for them. "Psychics" can only be partly saved, since - like the "somatics" - they have a tendency towards what is material. Though it is the soul that prevails in them, it is (just as the body) created by the lower spirits. It is only the "pneumatics", the real spiritual beings that are able to find full salvation, since it is in them — the gnostics — that the divine spark, or spirit lives, whose destiny is to be joined with the divine world, which is where it really belongs, and it shall happen the moment one is freed from this world.

Thus, the five levels of development and the categories of the inner psychic milieu are nothing else but the two types of typologies within the Theory of Positive Disintegration. Aurèle St.-Yves states it this way: "The ontogenesis of man is created by a series of five easily discernible levels that can also be considered types: primary integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, self-directed multilevel disintegration and secondary integration" (St.-Yves 1977, p. 145). And then: "The typologies offered by the theories of gnosticism and positive disintegration bear resemblance: a) presence of two extreme types with at least one transitional type, b) the difference between the types is determined in terms of superiority, c) the worse type is connected with the body" (St.-Yves 1977, p. 145-146). Aurèle St.-Yves also ponders on the differences between the two typologies and concludes that "the gnostic typology is determined by heredity alone and no transition from one type to another is possible", while "Dąbrowski's typology results from the interaction of ontogenetic and phylogenetic factors, and although the borders are determined by heredity, the individual can evolve from one type to another until he reaches his own border" (St.-Yves 1977, p. 146).

Now, finally, the so-called humanistic aspect of the patient-therapist relation that comes out in the theory becomes evident. Dąbrowski considers it a misunderstanding to treat psychotherapy as a method of healing of the former. On the contrary, he regards conflicts as necessary for a positive and accelerated development and as a source of creativity. In psychotherapy, he endeavours to uncover the positive elements of the patient's developmental potential and to encourage him to actualize them. Emphasis is not on one's intellectual predispositions but rather on the quality of one's emotions, which, above all, make a man of value. And a man who would like to self-actualize fully, would have to overcome biological limitations first, then the environmental influence and, finally, his own psychic type, so that he could, within the structure of his personality, incorporate or mix features of the opposite psychic type and, for example, become introvertic and extrovertic at the same time, and by doing so, oppose the stereotypes, present in himself (cf. Gaston-René De Grâce 1977, p. 84).

### **POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION AND FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS [8]**

Now that we have concluded the comparison with gnosticism, we shall go on to confront the Theory of Positive Disintegration with Freudian psychoanalysis, which still seems to be such a powerful and "unshakable" paradigm that no contemporary renowned psychotherapist can avoid taking a stance on it, in one form or another, especially if he really want to put forward his "own" psychotherapy and not just copy Freud. Of course, such "renowned" theoreticians are many — also in Poland — and they claim to have gone so far from Freud that they have almost buried him, while in fact they have not even approached him — for them, he is not born yet. Thus, the author of the Theory of Positive Disintegration dares to compare his theory to Freudism himself. In his work, "Psychoneurosis Is Not an Illness"

["Psychonerwica nie jest chorobą"] (Dąbrowski 1972a), Dąbrowski draws parallels not only with Freud, but also with some other theoreticians such as Jung, Adler, Horney, Erikson, Maslow and Rogers.

We can say without any exaggeration that Dąbrowski opposes Freud throughout the whole of his theory, but it is especially visible in the following three aspects: primary developmental aspects, primary principles of development and criteria of mental health. As it is universally known, psychoanalysis considers development a result of interaction of two factors: heredity and environment. The Theory of Positive Disintegration assumes that autonomy is the third factor. It is of great theoretical-practical consequence. It is the autonomous strength that, to a degree, allows an individual to develop independently, as they are able to choose which direction to evolve and to transcend the inherited elements that are inseparably linked to biological constitution and the environment, in order to become in reality what they are potentially. Moreover, Dąbrowski claims that Freudian psychoanalysis underrated heredity in favour of the role of the environment.

In Freud's terms, the biological aspect is in fact an undifferentiated system of instincts that, to a lesser or greater extent, depends on experiences of a child in its first years of life, while according to Dąbrowski, even if the environment does influence development, the influence is a function of nature and a quality of the hereditary potential as well as the third factor. By the way, it should be added that Dąbrowski's stance on that is not unshakable. In some of his systematizations it is the third factor, before heredity and the environment that is located in the first place as the most important one. Both theories speak of developmental phases, but while psychoanalysis regards them as culturally determined, Dąbrowski defines them in relation to hierarchies of values which he calls universal (generally, one of the basic hypotheses of the Theory of Positive Disintegration is that there exist levels within emotional functions).

Both theories consider integration the ultimate goal of development. However, what occurs on the way from an "individual to personality" (integration) is the fundamental difference, which is connected, above all, with the "pace" of this process. Thus, in the Theory of Positive Disintegration, the highest level of integration (secondary integration) follows an extremely long process of positive disintegration. If the equilibrium is reached too quickly or too late, development is one-sided and partial. Moreover, Dąbrowski and Freud differ in the very outlook on the state of integration. According to the former, the state of equilibrium is antidevelopmental simply because it "relieves" the healthy tension, being a driving mechanism of the individual on his way to self-actualization. The latter believes that an individual is healthy if he can make do with using as little energy as possible and if he does not use defense mechanisms. According to Dąbrowski, one's ability to satisfy a primitive drive is not a criterion of mental health. He introduces a notion of levels of drives that are to make sure the rule of subordinating pleasures of a lower level to pleasures of a higher level is observed.

Establishing these hierarchies is meant to force the drive functions to crystallize during man's development. And here is the key difference: for psychoanalysis, adjustment is the basic criterion of distinguishing between the norm and pathology (not accidentally, psychoanalysis is sometimes referred to as a conformist therapy), while positive disintegration, on the contrary, sees (positive) maladjustment to what is and adjustment to what ought to or could be as a necessary condition for an individual to self-actualize at a higher level. With regard to this problem Gaston-René De Grace — a psychology professor at the same university that Aurèle St.-Yves works for — asks teasingly: "Is it so that an

individual devoted to self-actualization lacks the sense of common realism but has the sense of transcendental realism instead?" (De Grâce 1977, p. 85). Psychoanalysis still views psychoneurosis as an illness: it considers as normal an individual who is self-confident, does not have states of anxiety or depression etc., while for positive disintegration, psychoneurosis is not an illness but an important condition for development. For Dąbrowski, people who are not content with themselves, who are anxious about their development and feel inferior to what they could be and who have inhibitions are of better mental health than those that psychoanalysis regards as "pictures of health", because they undergo a process of positive change. Moreover, for the author of the Theory of Positive Disintegration, some symptoms of infantilism and immaturity - the ones that are far from real regression - do not indicate psychic impairment but can prove one's rich creative potential.

We shall agree with De Grâce then that anyone with their own theoretical investigation in mind ought to get acquainted with Dąbrowski's psychological and psychic notions, and his jargon in general, since he was the one, who "within his Theory of Positive Disintegration approached the positive aspect of the lack of a psychic equilibrium in a broader and deeper way than anyone else".

## NOTES

[1] The quoted issue of "Psychothérapies Actuelles", which is devoted mainly to the Theory of Positive Disintegration contains an article "Introduction to the Theory of Positive Disintegration" by its author.

[2] Although it seems that a much more consistent and sharp formulation of the conception of psychic change as a normal process, i.e. one that is healthy and necessary for creative development of a person, was offered by representatives of the school of the so-called antypsychiatry, especially R. D. Laing i T. Szasz, Dąbrowski had launched his attack on traditional psychiatry before. The most famous representatives of the so-called European antypsychiatry are R. Laing, M. Mannoni and others.

[3] Such as E. Erikson, E. Shostrom, R. May and V. Franki — they all came up with ideas, analogous to those underlying the Theory of Positive Disintegration. The South American colleagues were joined in their revolutionary ideas by the most famous representatives of the so-called European antypsychiatry (see note 2).

[4] In this respect Dąbrowski agrees with A. Maslow, who also claims that people who are devoted to self-actualization grant their values a specific (objective) ontological status.

[5] Aurèle St.-Yves, a social psychologist and a professor at Université Laval, draws analogies between some of the notions of positive disintegration and gnosticism (St.-Yves 1977, s. 146).

[6] In his "Difficulty of Existence" ["Trud istnienia"] (pp. 11-12) Dąbrowski writes: "Transcending — or surpassing — means rising above the level of the average, or even more than average, intellectual and affective activities that are characteristic of the primitive phases. Surpassing one's psychic type or biological cycle of life, sexual and self-preserving instinct at an average or more than average levels, or attempts to do so, can serve as examples of it".

[7] In "Personality and its Shaping through Positive Disintegration" ["Osobowość i jej

kształtowanie poprzez dezintegrację pozytywną"] (p. 111) the author of the theory writes that "there are five levels of the inner psychic milieu, from the level of primary integration, through the level of spontaneous multilevel disintegration, multilevel organised and self-directed disintegration, to secondary integration", and in "Psychothérapies Actuelles" he states that "each of the levels of development apart from the first one) corresponds to a different level (Chaque niveau du développement, excepté le premier, correspond à un niveau différent du milieu psychique interne...)". Here, I draw on the French text because it was written later.

[8] Here, we rely on an article by Gaston René De Grâce, who starts his comparison of positive disintegration and Freudian psychoanalysis by referring to N. Côté's article (1974).

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Côté N. (1974), Le concept de santé mentale en psychanalyse et dans la théorie de la désintégration positive, "Revista Portuguesa Para O Estudo Da Deficiencia Mental", 1, 4, p. 343 - 347.
- Dąbrowski K. (1937), "Psychological Bases of Self-Mutilation", [In:] Genetic Psychology Monographs, 19, p. 1 - 104, quoted after Dąbrowski K., Granger L. (eds.) (1977), Psychothérapies Actuelles, Canada
- Dąbrowski K. (1964), "O dezintegracji pozytywnej", Warszawa
- Dąbrowski K. (1972a), "La psychonévrose n'est pas une maladie", Québec
- Dąbrowski K. (1972b), "Le dynamisme des concepts" (Service à la psychologie), Québec
- Dąbrowski K (1975a), "Osobowość i jej kształtowanie poprzez dezintegrację pozytywną", Warszawa
- Dąbrowski K (1975b), "Trud istnienia", Warszawa
- De Grâce, Gaston-René (1977), Au-delà de la maladie mentale: présentation de l'oeuvre de Kazimierz Dąbrowski [In:] Psychothérapies Actuelles, Dąbrowski K., Granger L. (eds.), Canada
- Kępiński A. (1973), "Psychopatologia nerwic", Warszawa
- Schutz W. (1962), "On Multiple Realities", [In:] Collected Papers, vol. 1 with introduction by H. L. Van. Breda, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague
- St.-Yves A. (1977), "Dualizm i transcendencja" [In:] Psychothérapies Actuelles, Dąbrowski K., Granger L. (eds.), Canada

[Home](#)