

The Psychological Role of Meditation in Personality Change From the Perspective of the Theory of Positive Disintegration.

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Although Kazimierz Dąbrowski has nowhere, to my knowledge, discussed the practice of meditation in any detail, there are in his writings numerous references to meditation, contemplation, concentration, reflection, solitude and ecstasy, making it possible to infer a Dąbrowskian theory of meditation. In this paper I will examine the preconditions for meditation as well as the effects of the practice on the development of personality from the perspective of the theory of positive disintegration. More specifically, it is Dąbrowski's view that: (1) the prerequisites for effective meditation are that meditators possess a measure of psychic overexcitability and be at least in the upper half of unilevel disintegration; and (2) the effect of meditation is to facilitate the emergence of developmental dynamisms needed for personality growth. While my primary purpose is to articulate a theory of meditation that is grounded in the many references to the practice found in Kazimierz Dąbrowski's works, I will also cite empirical studies of meditation as confirmation of the theory elaborated.

ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR THE WORKS OF Dąbrowski

DC The Dynamics of Concepts

MG Mental Growth through Positive Disintegration

PNI Psychoneurosis is not an Illness

PS Personality-Shaping through Positive Disintegration

TLED Theory of Levels of Emotional Development, Vol. I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and method

The purpose of this study is to describe the practice of meditation from the perspective of Kazimierz Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration. Dąbrowski has nowhere written comprehensively, or at any length, on the subject of meditation. Nevertheless throughout his works there are numerous references to meditation, contemplation, ecstasy, reflection, the need for solitude, etc. And since these references are sufficiently varied in content and are at the same time highly consistent with each other, it is possible to gather them together and construct an overall view of meditation from the point of view of the positive disintegration theory.

This general method was employed by William Sadler (1970) when he compiled and appropriately arranged several portions of Abraham Maslow's Religions, Values and Peak Experiences to present Maslow's view of the religious aspects of peak experiences. William Hague (1976) did something similar in his description of the implications of positive disintegration for moral development, axiology and moral education, except that he (unlike Sadler) expressed Dąbrowski's ideas in his own words.

The specific method used in the present study for arriving at a dynamic description of meditation from the perspective of positive disintegration is as follows:

- (1) collection of references, mostly explicit, to meditation from *The Dynamics of Concepts, Mental Growth through Positive Disintegration, Psychoneurosis is not an Illness, Personality-Shaping through Positive Disintegration and Theory of Levels of Emotional Development*, vol. I.
- (2) Classification of the references into three general categories:
 - (a) effects of meditation on personality growth
 - (b) necessary conditions for effects from meditation practice to occur
 - (c) nature and function of meditation at each level and half level of personality development
- (3) synthesization of the references within each category.

The main focus of the paper is on the effects of meditation, the necessary conditions for its successful practice and an examination of the nature and role of meditation in each of the levels of personality growth. But some references are also made to experimental studies which appear to confirm Dąbrowski's observations and hypotheses, and a possible application to the study of traditional religious meditation is suggested.

Definition

In the glossary at the back of *Psychoneurosis is not an Illness* (p. 298) Dąbrowski defines meditation as the "practice of concentration leading to inner calmness and sense of well-being." However in the introduction to *The Dynamics of Concepts* a convincing case is made for the need to examine concepts from a dynamic or developmental point of view, rather than relying on single static definitions. Looked at dynamically meditation, in the broad sense of the word, is a process of interiorization which has its origins in discussion, reflection or philosophizing (PS, 166), matures into a systematic practice of deep calm concentration (TLED, 109) and finds its fulfillment in ecstasy (PS, 33-34).

Reflection is, in its turn, the capacity for retrospection, prospection and that type of analysis which results in self-knowledge (TLED, 149). It is primarily a discursive activity with rudimentary beginnings in superficial introspection which is characteristic of advanced unilevel disintegration. At higher levels "reflection" ceases to be analytic in nature, becoming more the practice of deep concentration and the cultivation of intuition (TLED, 109) ie. reflection becomes contemplation or "meditation" as defined in the glossary of *Psychoneurosis is not an Illness*. Contemplation is nowhere precisely or explicitly defined but the word is frequently used in conjunction with that of meditation and seems to imply a slightly more advanced form of meditation as defined in the aforementioned glossary. Ecstasy however is clearly defined in the glossary (PNI, 294) as

extreme absorption of attention resulting in semi-trance as a consequence of intense contemplation of a limited field; a state characteristic of mystical experiences.

Therefore meditation will ordinarily be used in this paper in the sense of covering a continuum from reflection to ecstasy. In a few places where Dąbrowski is indirectly quoted, meditation will have the meaning given in the glossary of *Psychoneurosis is not an Illness*, ie. "the practice of concentration leading to inner calmness and sense of well-being." Contemplation will always have the meaning just given for meditation but will imply a somewhat more advanced state of inner calmness and will further imply access to intuitive knowledge. Ecstasy will always have the meaning given above and concentration when used in the context of meditation stages will indicate a point somewhere between reflection and contemplation.

EFFECTS OF MEDITATION

The numerous references Dąbrowski makes to meditational effects can be classed into three categories:

- (1) effects described either are not explicitly related to development or if they are the description is more general than specific
- (2) effects described are specific eg. individual dynamisms or functions are identified
- (3) some indication is given as to how the effect is accomplished.

General or indirect effects

References to effects of meditation on personal development of a purely general nature are relatively few in number. Meditation is said to be a means to self-perfection (TLED, 141), increased awareness (TLED, 157), active love (TLED, 217) and a changed relationship with oneself and the external world (PNI, 14). Dąbrowski also says that meditation and contemplation prepare one for secondary integration (PS, 130).

Some of the effects mentioned are not specifically described as developmental, but almost as ends in themselves. Through meditation one comes to see the value of success (TLED, 137) and in it one can find a source of inspiration for artistic expression (TLED, 146). Meditation overcomes uncertainty (TLED, 155), enables one to collect one's strength in order to meet responsibilities (TLED, 126). Meditation has preserved some from going insane, while for others it has helped in recovery from psychosis (PNI, 129 & 133). Of course these effects are related to personality development, but the connection is not explicitly made in the context.

Specific effects

Prospection, retrospection and periodic isolation of oneself are said to promote all the dynamisms of multilevel disintegration (PS, 166) and further, meditation is even considered essential for the emergence of the higher level dynamisms (TLED, 170-171), 109 & DC, 82), the disposing and directing centre (TLED, 171), self-awareness and self-control (MG, 70), empathy (PNI, 129 & 191) and hierarchization (PS, 166). Meditation also regulates the synthesis of the instinct for self-perfection from other dynamisms (DS, 32 & 38).

Meditation is described as encouraging certain positive developmental functions while inhibiting those which retard development. Positive developmental functions which are initiated by meditation include intuitive and synthetic thinking (TLED, 55, 152 & 219; DC, 188), ability to evaluate one's mental structure (DC, 82), awareness of one's weaknesses and achievements (TLED, 121) and a humble respect for higher human values (TLED, 187). Meditation practice also enables one to separate from one's instinctive structure (PS, 130), to be purified of impulsive tendencies (TLED, 121 & PS, 33), to relinquish lower values to which one has been attached (PS, 32-33) and to disintegrate the self-preservation instinct thus making personality development possible (TLED, 179). In addition, meditation is considered a help in the process of transcending one's psychological type, ie, introverts develop extroversion and vice versa (TLED, 51), in the sublimation of sexual energy (TLED, 82) and in the shaping of chief interests and abilities, such as the ability to form exclusive bonds or the ability to develop a feeling of "oneness" and self-identity (PS, 167).

How meditation produces its effects

Various of Dąbrowski's remarks on the effects of meditation seem to provide clues as to the way in which these effects are brought about some are even suggestive or operational hypotheses. Contemplation is described as a process of gathering psychic strength enabling both better control over one's instinctive nature (PS, 34) and at the same time enabling internal reshaping (PS, 130). This would seem to imply that contemplation is a means of focusing the various forms of overexcitability (ie. psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, emotional and intellectual) in order to more effectively apply them to the developmental task.

The way in which contemplation plays a role in the formation of higher moral principles is by aiding the development of intuitive and synthetic thought (TLED, 219). Solitude and concentration promote the dynamism of autopsychotherapy in two ways: by containing the areas of conflict and tension (ie. by promoting relaxation) and further by transforming psychic conflicts into processes which promote development (TLED, 51-52).

In general the way in which meditation promotes growth is by making possible an awareness of the complexity of one's psychic structure (PS, 130). Once this awareness exists the individual is then able to critically assess him or herself, consider alternatives and make plans for self-improvement (PS, 133). The most obvious contribution that meditation practice makes in this process is to withdraw attention away from external stimuli, thus reducing their influence and at the same time creating an inner space for self-observation (MG, 75).

Dąbrowski also suggests a possible physiological basis for various meditational effects. In *Psychoneurosis is not an Illness* (54-56) he says that inspiration and ecstasy can be both integrative and disintegrative. Their integrative effect is to organize the activities of the whole psyche into a temporary unity. Many of Dąbrowski's patients reported that they experienced a temporary integration of a global character through the practice of meditation (PNI, 129). The details of how this comes about are not directly given but the disintegrative effect, described as autonomic disequilibrium, is said to result from excitation of either the sympathetic or parasympathetic systems.

If the sympathetic system is stimulated, the individual tends toward excessive activity. On the other hand stimulation of the parasympathetic system leads to feelings of depression. In both cases the consequence is psychic conflict and, in the individual with developmental potential, the effort to overcome these conflicts aids in giving birth to the process of hierarchization, since it is this process which provides a way out of psychic conflict (PNI, 54-55).

Empirical confirmation

Many of Dąbrowski's observations and conjectures appear to be confirmed by recent experimental research. One example is the inhibiting effect of meditation. The process of disintegration which makes personality development possible requires that automatisms be weakened in some way (MG, 136). And Dąbrowski has suggested that meditation will cause a separation from the instinctive structure (PS, 130) and a purification of impulsive tendencies (TLED, 121 & PS, 33). Confirmation of this is given in the experimental work Arthur Deikman (1966).

Deikman found that meditators experienced "deautomatization of psychological structures that organize, limit, select and interpret visual stimuli" (1966, 220). Just as motor behavioral procedures, once learned, become automated and intermediate steps used to learn the behavior drop out of consciousness (eg. in learning to drive a car), so also after perceptual and cognitive patterns have been learned in stages and have become established as habitual, the intermediate stages are forgotten. This process is very practical as it frees psychic energy for other tasks, but at the same time it leaves the individual "stuck" with a particular set of perceptual and cognitive habits. Meditation, by deautomatizing these habits, opens the way for a new mode of perceiving and thinking, and even clears the way for a new level of perceptual and cognitive organization.

Another example of empirical confirmation is in the area of empathy. According to Dąbrowski meditation leads to an increase in empathy toward others (TLED, 55) as in the case of Jan Wadysaw Dawid (PNI, 191). This is confirmed by several studies, including those of Lesh (1970), Leung (1973) and Schuster (1979). All three found that subsequent to meditation practice, regardless of whether an internal or external focus technique was used, counselors increased in their empathy toward clients.

In his description of meditation effects Dąbrowski does not mention the dynamism of subject-object in oneself by name, but he does say that meditation leads to an ability to evaluate one's mental structure (DC, 82) and an awareness of one's weaknesses and achievements (TLED, 121). This seems to include subject-object in oneself. Daniel Goleman (1971) explains that this is made possible through a process of global desensitization ie. the anxiety normally associated with self-criticism is diminished as a result of the deep relaxation which meditation produces, thus freeing the individual to critically evaluate him or herself.

Since the dynamism of self-awareness is a function of the activity of subject-object in oneself (TLED, 156) and since self-awareness includes responsibility (TLED, 44) one would expect that as self-awareness increased, so also would responsibility. One could further expect that if meditation leads to an increase in self-awareness, it would also lead to an increase in responsibility. In fact Dąbrowski has stated as much (TLED, 204). Two studies done by Deane Shapiro (1978 & in press) confirm this proposition ie. that meditation leads to an increase in responsibility.

Other correlations between meditational effects stated by Dąbrowski and empirical findings include the following. Dąbrowski claims that meditation promotes the growth of the personality ideal (TLED, 141) Bono (in press) found that meditation increased the congruence between a person's real and ideal self. Dąbrowski says meditation helps develop a feeling of "oneness" and identity (PS, 167) Howard Sacks (1979) made a study of the effects of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises on Jesuit novices and found that the Exercises had a significant integrative effect on the novices' self-systems. Dąbrowski says that an increase in self-control results from meditation (MG, 70) the research of Hjelle (1974) demonstrates that as a result of meditation there is a shift from an external to an internal locus of control (ie. a shift from letting others' ideas and behavior be determinative to taking responsibility for one's own decisions). This shift is also a sign of the advent of the third factor (TLED, 44).

There is also some support for Dąbrowski's proposed physiological basis ie. that ecstasy excites either the sympathetic or parasympathetic nervous systems (PNI, 55). Julian Davidson (1977) bases his discussion of the physiological processes in meditation on several experimental studies. He suggests that the effect of meditation is to decrease the arousal of the sympathetic nervous system and the related left hemisphere activity. This the parasympathetic system and right hemisphere activity are stimulated, leading to the "feelings of oppression" or reflectiveness referred to by Dąbrowski. However Davidson goes on to explain that if the stimulation is intense enough (a result of meditative proficiency) there is a spill-over of nervous excitation and both systems and both hemispheres are equally and simultaneously stimulated, producing the oceanic feelings (temporary global integrations) reported by Dąbrowski's patients (PNI, 129).

NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR MEDITATION

Dąbrowski refers to overexcitability (PNI, 66), inner psychic transformation (TLED, 101) and capacity for self-evaluation (PS, 32) as necessary conditions for the successful practice of meditation. He also mentions that the development of meditative ability will correspond with domination by feelings of sadness, isolation, loneliness, thoughts of suicide and with preparation for death (PNI, 99).

Those individuals endowed with great developmental potential are the ones who show interest in meditation (PNI, 99). But one of the primary determinants of developmental potential is overexcitability (TLED, 32). Specifically mentioned are the emotional, imaginal and intellectual forms of overexcitability (DC, 8; DC, 173; PNI, 66 & TLED, 36), because it is these three which give rise to psychic richness as well as broad insight into the many levels and dimensions of reality.

Equally important for the development of meditative ability is that the psychomotor and sensual forms of overexcitability come under the control of the other three (PNI, 133). This is accompanied by inner psychic transformation (TLED, 101 & MG, 81) and self-evaluation (MG, 81 & PS, 32). Thus there is something of

a feedback loop in which the factors necessary, at least in precursor form, for meditation are themselves stimulated to increased activity as a result of meditation practice.

There is support for the above from some experimental research. Inner psychic transformation, as a fourth level dynamism, assumes an internal locus of control (TLED, 44) in order to perform its transformative functions (MG, 169-170). Beiman (1980, in press) found that the higher individuals scored on a measure of internal locus of control, the more they benefited from transcendental meditation "benefit" being measured by the Fear Survey Schedule and two electrodermal measures of autonomic arousal. Smith (1978) discovered that continuation in meditation could be predicted by high scores on a self-criticism scale. Those least likely to be threatened by critical self-evaluation were least likely to abandon meditation practice.

MEDITATION IN DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS

Level I: Primary integration

At this level no meditation is possible in fact there is not even any reflective activity, in the sense of self-evaluation (TLED, 108) and there is a very low tolerance for solitude (TLED, 170). In general cognitive activities function in the service of basic needs, but even when they operate at a higher level (as in scientific or scholarly pursuits), cognitive activities in an individual in level I always function in complete isolation from the other dimensions of personality, which remain characteristically primitive (TLED, 148).

Level II: Unilevel disintegration

Whereas in level I the emotional and intellectual functions do not at all interact, says Dąbrowski (TLED, 149), in this level they begin to do so and this results in a precursor of reflection ie. a certain limited capacity for retrospection, prospection and analysis and thus a primitive knowledge of oneself is possible. Dąbrowski (TLED, 108) also says that in this level there is a certain degree of interiorization and some, even if superficial, introspection.

In other places in the same work however, Dąbrowski suggests that there is usually a distaste for solitude (TLED, 170) and an absence of reflection (TLED, 42) probably due to the fact that the individual is almost completely influenced by social opinion, the ideas and example of others, and motivated by a need for recognition and approval (TLED, 41). The research of Beiman (1980) ⁽¹⁾ would seem to support this latter statement, but the question still remains as to whether reflective meditation, even in a rudimentary form, is possible in unilevel disintegration. This is the only question to which Dąbrowski appears to give contradictory answers.

Perhaps this seeming contradiction can be resolved when it is realized that no level of personality development is completely homogeneous for at least two reasons. The first is that any given level will

almost always contain residue dynamisms and behaviors from previous levels and precursor dynamisms and behaviors which anticipate the next highest level. The second reason is that not all dimensions of personality develop perfectly simultaneously. Thus, for example, the affective dimension may outpace the imaginal or intellectual ones in its progress. To the degree that development is multidimensional, the disintegration is called global otherwise it is partial.

It may well be that an individual in level II, whose disintegration is global, even though unilevel, and who has in operation some precursor dynamisms, is capable of some rudimentary form of reflection while another individual who is either barely into the unilevel disintegrative process or else whose disintegration is only partial, is thereby virtually incapable of reflectively acquired self-knowledge. Everything considered, it would seem correct to say that meditative activity, especially of the systematic kind, does not normally play a role in unilevel disintegration.

Interface between levels II and III

At the transition point from unilevel disintegration to spontaneous multilevel disintegration psychic tension arises within the inner psychic milieu providing conditions for the development of new viewpoints, ideas and attitudes. These are a reflection of the increased need for maladjustment to what is, as well as the increased need for adjustment to what ought to be ie. to new higher level phenomena (PNI, 128). At this point also psychomotor and sensual overexcitability come under the control of affective, imaginal and intellectual overexcitability with the result that the first two forms of overexcitability lose their isolated character and the latter three acquire a higher potential for evolving stage III dynamisms (PNI, 130).

Reflective meditation has a role to play in the process of evolving stage III dynamisms. Reflection becomes combined with affective memory making possible a comparison between past and present experiences and actions. As the depth of reflection increases so does the manifestation of multilevel processes. For example the more negative is the judgement of one's behavior (as a result of comparisons between past and present), the stronger certain dynamisms become eg. dissatisfaction with oneself, empathy with others, and subject-object in oneself (TLED, 108-109).

William Hague (1976) in his introductory presentation of the theory of positive disintegration, says that the movement from unilevel to multilevel disintegration is one in which an intellect subordinated to primitive drives is replaced by an intellect in collaboration with higher emotions, the fractional is replaced by the integrative the primitive by the reflective, and the impulsive by the meditative. Dąbrowski himself says that at this point meditation is experienced in terms of a growing calmness and a recollected concentration giving a presentiment that new and important contents of consciousness are about to emerge (PNI, 128-129). It would seem that a precursor of the meditation gradient can be found in this transition zone between levels II and III, even though its practice is probably more occasional than systematic.

Level III: Spontaneous multilevel disintegration

There are several references, implicit as well as explicit, to meditation in this level. For the sake of giving them some structure, a threefold classification is used: (1) those references which are purely descriptive (1) those which mention the results of meditation, and (3) those which indicate causes of meditative phenomena or development.

In Psychoneurosis is not an Illness, Dąbrowski says that individuals endowed with a great developmental potential often experience both depression and a beginning interest in meditation (PNI, 99). Since depressions come about as a result of disquietude and dissatisfaction with oneself, feelings of inferiority and feelings of guilt (PNI, 98) and since these dynamisms are characteristic of level III (TLED, 38), it is logical to conclude that individuals with a developmental potential often become interested in meditation somewhere in level III. And in other references Dąbrowski says as much ie. that in level III there is the beginning of attempts at concentration and meditation (TLED, 152).

At this stage solitude appears as a need and isolation is sought as a way of gaining self-understanding and insight into others. This is accompanied by an increased need for reflection, meditation and contemplation (TLED, 170-171). In the hierarchization of the sexual life (as well as in other areas of life) reflection and valuation are increasingly involved (TLED, 78). There is frequently reflection and meditation on death (TLED, 179) and if there ever have been experiences of a mystical nature in the individual's life, their memory keeps returning and has a strong impact (TLED, 167). Also at this stage there can be found a need for solitary "contemplation" of nature and art (TLED, 171).

One result of meditation (and solitude) at this level is to promote the dynamisms of multilevel disintegration (TLED, 170-171). Another result is that there is a hierarchization in the understanding of "success," with the emphasis shifting away from material forms of success to moral, altruistic and creative accomplishments (TLED, 137). Finally at level III the increasing depth and quality of interiorization (a consequence of sadness) is the cause of a new experience of joy (TLED, 129).

As to the possible causes of reflection and concentration at level III, a few hints are given. To begin with, the dynamism of shame plays a role by producing an impulse to get away from other people in order to sort out behavior and attitudes which contradict newly acquired higher values. This is explicitly mentioned in the case of sexual behavior, but implicitly it applies to other areas of life as well (TLED, 80).

In level III a hierarchy of feelings is developed enabling the beginnings of intuition (TLED, 152). That is to say, since intuition is the apprehension of higher level emotions, and since hierarchization makes it easier to identify higher emotions, hierarchization facilitates intuitive ability. Another factor aiding intuitive development is that in this stage cognition comes under the influence, and eventually the control, of the

higher emotions (TLED, 149). Or, put in another way, higher emotional elements begin to act and cooperate with discursive factors (TLED, 160).

Thus we can see a change taking place in cognitive style (a shift which obviously has implications for meditation practice): thinking shifts from relative independence to cooperation with newly recognized higher emotions. And these higher emotions become increasingly a source of inspiration and direction. In meditation practice the shift will therefore be from an exclusively intellectual approach toward an increase in affectivity.

Transition from level III to level IV

For this half stage there are only three references. Commenting on the gradient of reflection Dąbrowski says that the growth of reflection at this point is marked by an increase of empathetic, altruistic and existential concerns (TLED, 109). Parallel to this is the following remark in *Psychoneurosis is not an Illness*: In hysteria of an existential kind, which happens at the transition stage between levels III and IV, "elements" of meditation and ecstasy occur. Finally, meditation is mentioned as a good model of education-of-oneself a dynamism which operates at the interface of levels III and IV (TLED, 51-52).

Level IV: Organized multilevel disintegration

References to meditation in this level are the most numerous of all. Many describe meditational effects, some deal with the nature of meditation and a few indicate possible causes. In this level it is implied that as a result of meditation one experiences heightened or transcendental awareness (TLED, 156) and profound pleasures (TLED, 126). An important feature is that meditation and contemplation are definitely systematic (TLED, 143) and that solitude rather than just happening, is planned (TLED, 171) a reflection of the organized nature of this level of disintegration. Decisions are worked out in the context of solitude, meditation and contemplation (TLED, 171) and various attitudes and behaviors (eg. the magical) no longer work in isolation but are at the service of meditation and contemplation (TLED, 161).

Some writers (eg. Prince & Savage, 1966) have maintained that the "mystical" states which resulted from meditation practice were "regressions in the service of the ego." While Dąbrowski admits that such regressions are possible in stage III, it is no longer the case for the fourth level, where the term "regression" can only be used in a metaphorical sense (TLED, 204).

The effects of meditation in level IV can be seen in terms of initiating and/or facilitating either: (1) functions or (2) dynamisms. Among the functions developed can be found artistic expression (TLED, 146), intuition (TLED, 152) or mystical insight (TLED, 121 & 150), strength for external activities (TLED, 204), increased objectivity in determining religious needs (TLED, 143), capacity to transcend one's psychological type, ie. introvert or extrovert (TLED, 51) and sublimation of sexual energy (TLED, 82).

When taken up seriously and systematically, the practice of meditation serves as a means of self-perfection (TLED, 126) assisting in the conversion of one's experiences and actions into factors promoting personality growth (TLED, 156), awareness of one's weaknesses or subject-object in oneself (TLED, 121), inner psychic transformation and the directing and disposing centre (MG, 75 & TLED, 171) and autopsychotherapy (TLED, 51-52).

One way in which meditation produces its effects in level IV is reminiscent of the desensitization process in behavioral therapy ie. the resulting inner calm inhibits lower level excitation (TLED, 121) thus containing areas of conflict and tension, and even transforming them into developmental processes (TLED, 51-52). And the development of insight to the highest levels by means of inner psychic transformation, said to be related to contemplative experience (TLED, 101), is most probably due to the fact that cognition no longer functions in isolation but rather is at the service of personality development a process guided by an established hierarchy of values (TLED, 150). The establishment, at level III, of a hierarchy of feeling and the subjection of cognition to higher feelings undoubtedly continues to play a role here.

Transition from level IV to level V

As already stated, meditation, by shutting off external stimuli, promotes the process of inner psychic transformation in level IV -in level IV-V inner psychic transformation promotes the dynamisms of autonomy and identification with the personality ideal (MG, 75). And the synthesis of the instinct for self-perfection is especially the work of dynamisms which operate at the transition between organized multilevel disintegration and secondary integration, such as autonomy, authenticity, the disposing and directing centre (of a higher level) and the personality ideal (DC, 28). This synthesis is usually regulated and systematized by concentration, contemplation and ecstasy (DC, 32).

At this level, it is also said that the individual discovers his own ideal and those of others through mystical experiences and that intuitive-synthetic insights obtained during contemplation enable him or her to have a profound empathy for others which in turn makes possible a more individualized and nuanced moral evaluation (TLED, 55).

Level V: Secondary integration

There are several references to meditative effects in level V. The systematic practice of meditation and contemplation contributes to the recognition, development and empowering of the personality ideal (TLED, 141 & 171), an increase in awareness (TLED, 157), humility (TLED, 187) and active love (TLED, 217). Contemplation and ecstasy play a role in overcoming uncertainty (TLED, 155), in developing an intuitive capacity to formulate moral principles (TLED, 219), and in creating a synthesis of altruistic human values (TLED, 185). Finally contemplation is said to be a source of the highest levels of bliss (TLED, 126).

However what is most distinctive of meditation in this level is that it is integrated into the totality of the secondarily integrated person's thinking, feeling, willing and acting. Although contemplation continues to be a distinct activity, all other activities and functions are also carried on in the spirit of contemplative calm and insight. This is portrayed in Dąbrowski's description of four functions (intuition, enthusiasm, solitude and reflection) in the fifth level (TLED, 152, 164 171 & 109).

Enthusiasm is calm and integrated, directed primarily toward higher level emotions and moral values "it is an enthusiasm of silence, meditation, contemplation and ecstasy" (TLED, 164). Meditative solitude deepens relationships contact being by means other than the usual perceptual and verbal cues, ie. by means of intuitive and transcendental perceptions (TLED, 171).

Reflection takes place within a global awareness and is not characterized so much by analytical argument but, through the systematic practice of "deep calm concentration," relies mainly on the operation of intuition. And intuition is not the hit and miss affair of lower levels, but a reliable process of knowing and cognizing, due to the synthesis of the various dimensions (eg. emotional and cognitive) of personality. This synthesis makes possible a remarkable multidimensional and multilevel internal and external grasp of reality such that it can only be referred to as contemplative and mystical (TLED, 109 & 152).

APPLICATION TO RELIGIOUS MEDITATION

Meditation in two religious traditions

In both Buddhism and Christianity, the practice of meditation is divided into stages which from a psychological point of view are remarkably similar. In both, the beginning meditator is initially engaged in rational reflection which increases his faith in higher values and motivates him to abandon lower impulses. Partly as a function of achieving these goals and partly as a function of an increase in the ability to concentrate, a higher affective element enters into the experience. Next meditation loses its discursive quality ie. it becomes increasingly one-pointed and the affective dimension becomes more subtle. At this point meditation is a source of a synthetic-intuitive grasp of higher values (as presented in the respective doctrines of the two religions) and a means of final personality integration.

According to Adolphe Tanqueray (whose manual on the spiritual life was used in the training of Catholic priests up until the Second Vatican Council) the proper form of mental prayer for beginners is discursive meditation in which rational considerations predominate. By means of such, religious convictions are acquired and strengthened. Further, the practice enlightens the aspirant "as to the malice of sin" and encourages detachment "from the world and its false pleasures" (Tanqueray, 1930, 321-322).

The Buddhist monk has similarly to become established in the values of his religion before taking up the practice of one-pointed meditation. That is to say, he has to practice a reflective form of meditation. He may

rationally consider the impurities of the body, the various pains of purgatory, the loathsomeness of food, etc to cultivate a sense of detachment. On the other hand, in order to aid his aspiration toward higher values, he reflects on friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity (Anuruddha, 1956, II, 109-110; Dayal, 1975, 225-229 & Gyatso, 1975, 37).

As Christian religious convictions become firmly established through discursive meditation, the focus gradually shifts away from rational considerations and more play is given to affections, which are centred on the perfection of God in Christ and the aspiration to integrate the whole of one's life into his will. At the same time other sentiments arise such as shame, confusion and humiliation over shortcomings and there arises a desire for self-perfection (Tanqueray, 1930, 461-462).

Affective prayer is followed by what is known as the prayer of simplicity and then the prayer of quiet. Here all rational reflection disappears in fact it is replaced by an intuitive understanding of first principles. At the same time, the multiplicity of affections (eg. joy, love, gratitude, sorrow for sins, etc) are replaced by a gentle and peaceful contemplation (Tanqueray, 1930, 637-639). In the final stage of Christian meditation (infused contemplation), there is an experiential knowledge of God and ultimately an intimate, serene and permanent union of the total person with God (Tanqueray, 1930, 652 & 691).

The Buddhist monk, once he has established himself in the teaching of his religion by means of rational reflection, begins to practice one-pointed meditation. This can take place within the context of a rational reflection in fact in the first jhana (ie. level of one-pointed concentration) there exists some measure of rational reflection along with the affects of joy and happiness. In the second jhana however there is only the affective components and concentration upon the meditative object analytic thought has ceased. By the fourth, jhana joy and happiness are replaced by a calm equanimity which is frequently an occasion for profound insights into the nature of reality ie. a source of higher and direct knowledge leading ultimately to nirvana, or liberation (Buddhaghosa, 1976, 120-126 & Nyanaponika, 1965, 56).

Meditation in religion and in positive disintegration

Not only are the Buddhist and Christian descriptions of meditational stages psychologically similar, but these bear a significant correlation to the stages of meditation which can be derived from Dąbrowski's references to the subject. It would appear that meditation as a deliberate and systematic activity becomes possible somewhere in level III (TLED, 152) this is consistent with the fact that it is in this level that the third factor begins to be operative (TLED, 44).

Meditation for Dąbrowski, as for the religious traditions, begins with rational reflection. But as cognition comes under the control of higher emotions in stage III (TLED, 149), it may be assumed that these emotions begin to play an increasing role in meditation, until in level IV meditational experiences are a

source of profound pleasure (TLED, 126). The advent of this affective dimension in meditation could well correspond with what Catholic mystical theology refers to as affective prayer and with the Buddhist's first and second jhanas.

Dąbrowski points out that in level IV meditation consolidates detachment from lower level impulses (TLED, 121) and promotes integration around higher level values (MG, 52 & TLED, 101 & 150). In the transition from level IV to level V contemplative and ecstatic forms of meditation regularize and systematize the synthesis and focusing of efforts at self-perfection (DC, 32) and at this level the personality ideal becomes known through the intuitive-synthetic insights attained in contemplation (TLED, 55). These descriptions of the function and effects of meditation indicate that at level IV and at the transition from level IV to V, meditation promotes a reintegration of personality.

Since in level IV meditation is a facilitator of an intuitive-synthetic cognitive style, the method used will not be that of rational linear thought, but some form or other of one-pointedness, corresponding to the Christian prayer of simplicity and the prayer of quiet or to the third and fourth jhanas of Buddhism.

The point to the above comparisons is as follows. If indeed there is any substance to a comparison of meditation in Dąbrowski's third level and discursive meditation as practised in Christianity and Buddhism, then it would seem that discursive meditation has as one of its psychological effects both the disintegration of a lower level of personality and the establishment of a hierarchy of values both of these ends being accomplished by the promotion of those dynamisms which characterize spontaneous multilevel disintegration.

Again, if the comparison between meditation at the fourth level of personality development and the one-pointed meditation of the religious traditions has any validity, then it is plausible to suspect that a psychological consequence of one-pointed meditation is to promote personality integration around the personality ideal.

It may also be the case, for individuals in level III, that beginning one-pointed meditation prematurely would have the effect of retarding the process of disintegration and instead initiating a process of reintegration. But since the necessary disintegration is cut short, the reintegration might easily be organized around a lower level impulse (ie. partial integration cf TLED, 19) and enlist a developed intellect or imagination in the service of such an impulse. This could explain the Buddhist notion that it is possible for even an evil man to attain the highest level of one-pointed meditation (Johansson, 1970, 99). The attempt to validate all this experimentally should naturally take into account the unique contribution of the theory of positive disintegration.

Dąbrowski has maintained that what is unique to his theory is not the idea of personality development, nor even the insight that this development requires a disintegration of primitive personality structures to prepare the way for a reintegration at a higher level. Both these ideas, while rare, can be found among psychologists, particularly of the humanistic and trans-personal schools. What is unique to the positive disintegration model is the identification and description of the dynamisms which characterize the various levels of growth.

By establishing parallels between meditational development as understood in religious traditions and in the theory of positive disintegration, it becomes possible to examine the effects of meditation in terms of detailed personality factors i.e. in terms of Dąbrowski's dynamisms. At the same time a standard is set up whereby the effects of meditation can be evaluated (psychologically). Discursive meditation is successful to the extent that it promotes disintegration and hierarchization, whereas one-pointed meditation is effective to the degree that it aids in the reintegration of the personality a process which begins in Dąbrowski's fourth level.

CONCLUSION

The two different methods of organizing Dąbrowski's references to meditation each serve an important purpose. Classifying the references into categories of effects of meditation practice or necessary preconditions, enables comparison with empirical research. Since there are a large number of such studies and since research is ongoing, a comprehensive correlation between them and Dąbrowski's statements on meditation would be of great value. Such a study could then be followed by the formulation of precise operational hypotheses and experimental attempts at confirmation.

On the other hand, organizing the meditational references according to the theory of positive disintegration makes possible the construction of a tentative model of meditation stages (tentative since research findings will undoubtedly lead to revisions and refinements) which correlates with developmental levels of personality. This model can then be applied to a variety of areas such as the study of religious mysticism, the sociology of religion and the use of meditation in psychotherapy. An example of the application of the meditation model to religious mysticism has already been suggested.

The meditation model derived from Dąbrowski's references could be useful to sociologists of religion in their study of meditation groups (Eastern and Western). For example it could serve as a means of distinguishing between the motives of individual members. In so far as a meditation group appeals to level I persons it will, in reality, be satisfying (or covertly holding out the promise of satisfying) primitive needs and not the need for personality change. Level II individuals will more likely participate for reasons relating to the need for self-affirmation, and since they are susceptible to social pressures, one may expect the groups in which they participate to make use of such pressures. On the other hand, for both level III and

level IV individuals meditation has an intrinsic appeal and social coercion would not be as necessary to maintain participation in the group or movement. Again the sociologist of religion might be interested in how the premature practice of one-pointed meditation, by preventing disintegration, global reintegration and consequently the emergence of the dynamisms of autonomy and authenticity, makes the individual more dependent on the religious organization or on the organization's guru.

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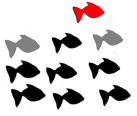
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