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Inner Growth:  
Unilevel and Multilevel Development  
according to Dabrowski's Theory



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LEVELS OF EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
ACCORDING TO DABROWSKI'S THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

[Adapted from Nelson (1989), Maxwell (1992) and Piechowski (1992)]

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**Level V: Secondary Integration**

The struggle for self-mastery has been won. Inner conflicts regarding the self have been resolved through actualization of the personality ideal. Disintegration has been transcended by the integration of one's values into one's living and being. The life is lived in service to humanity. It is lived according to the highest, most universal principles of loving—compassionate regard for the worth of every individual.

*A magnetic field in the soul—Dag Hammarskjöld*

**Level IV: Organized Multilevel Disintegration**

Individuals are well on the road to self-actualization. They have found a way to reach their own ideals, and they are effective leaders in society. They show high levels of responsibility, authenticity, reflective judgment, empathy for others, autonomy of thought and action, self-awareness, and other attributes associated with self-actualization.

*Behind tranquility lies conquered unhappiness—Eleanor Roosevelt*

**Level III: Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration**

Multilevelness arises. The person develops a hierarchical sense of values. Inner conflict is vertical, a struggle to bring up one's behavior to higher standards. There is a dissatisfaction with what one is, because of a competing sense of what one could and ought to be (personality ideal). This internal struggle between higher and lower can be accompanied by existential despair, anxiety, depression, and feelings of dissatisfaction with the self (inferiority, disquietude, astonishment).

*Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor\*—Marcus Tullius Cicero*

**Level II: Unilevel Disintegration**

Individuals are influenced primarily by their social group and by mainstream values, or they are moral relativists for whom "anything goes," morally speaking. They often exhibit ambivalent feelings and indecisive flip-flop behavior because they have no clear cut set of self-determined internal values. Inner conflicts are horizontal, a contest between equal, competing values.

*A reed shaken in the wind—Mathew, XI, 7*

**Level I: Primary Integration**

Egocentrism prevails. A person at this level lacks the capacity for empathy and self-examination. When things go wrong, someone else is always to blame; self-responsibility is not encountered here. With nothing within to inhibit personal ambition, individuals at Level I often attain power in society by ruthless means.

*Dog-eat-dog mentality.*

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\* I regard the better but follow the worse

## MILLER'S CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF LEVELS OF DEVELOPMENT

(N. B. Miller, & L. K. Silverman. (1987) Levels of personality development. *Roeper Review* 9, 221-225)

	Values	Feelings toward self	Feelings toward others
Level I	self-serving	egocentric	superficial
Level II	stereotypical	ambivalent	adaptive
Level III	individual	inner conflict	interdependent
Level IV	universal	self-direction	democratic
Level V	transcendent	peace & harmony	communistic (transpersonal)

## Unilevel Growth Process

## The Gestalt Prayer

( F. Perls. *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*. Lafayette, CA: The Real People Press, 1969)

*I do my thing and you do your thing.  
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations  
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.  
You are you and I am I,  
And if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.  
If not, it can't be helped.*

From a college student, age 19:

*Q: In your own efforts to establish a stable ego identity, has your quest for and confusion over an occupational identity been a major concern and disturbance for you? Discuss the experience.*

Yes, it has, because of my confusion as to what I want to become. I have many interests but I'm at a point where I don't know which one to follow which I really like the most. I'm indecisive and lack the knowledge of what I really like and want to become. It disturbs [me] because I wonder when I will know or if I'll jump into a field that I later will be disappointed with. I feel also that I must be going nowhere and am as if I've no direction.

*Q. Have you now established a satisfying occupational identity? If so, has this achievement been of major importance to you in your overall ability and ego identity formation? Discuss.*

No, I have not and when I do I'll let you know. I'm juggling many ideas in the air—I always tend to change my mind, perhaps nothing appeals to me or perhaps I think it should be easier to jump into something or even perhaps I've no patience.

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Examples excerpted from M.F. Belenky, B.McV. Clinchy, N.R. Goldberger, & J. M. Tarule.  
*Women's Ways of Knowing*. Basic Books, 1986.

### Liberation from Passive Acceptance of External Authority: Trust in Subjective Knowing

[A woman interviewed for the study] was no longer subject to the dictates and whims of external authorities and no longer agreed with what some people thought was a simple matter of right and wrong. Things for her were not so clear-cut as before. She no longer thought of herself as dumb, as a know-nothing.... Her way of knowing and understanding the world had changed.

*I can only know with my gut. I've got it tuned to a point where I think and feel all at the same time and I know what is right. My gut is my best friend—the one thing in the world*

*that won't let me down or lie to me or back away from me. [p. 53]*

Voices of other women:

*It's like a certain feeling that you have inside you. It's like someone could say something to you and you have a feeling. I don't know if it's like a jerk or something inside you. It's hard to explain. [p. 69]*

*There's a part of me that I didn't even realize I had until recently—instinct, intuition, whatever. It helps me and protects me. It's perceptive and astute. I just listen to the inside of me and I know what to do. [p. 69]*

### Walking Away from the Past

*Being married to him was like having another kid. I was his emotional support system. After I had my son, my maternal instincts were coming out of my ears. They were filled up to here! I remember the first thing I did was to let all my plants die, I couldn't take care of another damned thing. I didn't want to water them, I didn't want to feed anybody. Then I got rid of my dog. [p. 78]*

This woman divorced her husband, moved to a different town with their son, and went exploring alternative lifestyles

### The Quest for Self

*I always thought there were rules and that if you followed the rules, you'd be happy. And I never understood why I wasn't. I'd get to thinking, gee, I'm good, I follow the rules. I do everything they tell me to, and things don't go right for me. My life was a mess. I wrote to a priest that I was very fond of and I asked him, "What do I do to make things right?" He had no answers. This time it dawned on me that I was not going to get the answers from anybody. I would have to find them myself. [p. 61]*

The sense of self fluctuates, but there is exhilaration and optimism in the process of change:

*It's hard to say who I am because I don't really think about more than tomorrow. In the future I'll probably have a better understanding, because now I simply don't know. I think it will really be a fun thing to find out. Just do everything until I find out. [p. 83]*

*I'm only the person that I am at this moment. Tomorrow I'm somebody different, and the day after that I'm somebody different.... I'm always changing. Everything is always changing. [p. 83]*

Opening to novelty and change—imagery of birth, rebirth, and childhood:

*I've never had a personality. I've always been someone's daughter, someone's wife, someone's mother. Right now I'm so busy being born, discovering who I am, that I don't know who I am. And I don't know where I'm going. And everything is going to be fine. [p. 82]*

*The person I see myself as now is just like an infant. I see myself as beginning. Whoever I can become, that's a wide-open possibility. [p. 82]*

*I actually think that the person I am now is only about three to four years old with all these new experiences. I always was kind of led, told what to do. Never really thought much about myself. Now I feel like I'm learning all over again. [p. 82]*

## Unilevel to Multilevel Transition in an Adolescent

### *My Self*

by Todd Hartley, age 16

*I am myself, although  
I know not which self that is.  
For I am many identities  
Trapped within one reality.  
I am the eagle  
For my imagination soars above the earth.  
I am the lamb  
Timid and shy, and yet  
I am also the lion  
The king of my world.  
And when I roar  
All my selves must obey.  
I cannot say which is the true me,*

*Or, if there is truly me at all  
So, I persevere,  
I search and seek and hope to find  
Myself,  
The one island amidst a sea of swirling identities  
Come,  
Help me in my quest.  
For you are as much me  
As I am you.  
And both of us together can never be one,  
The world can never be one,  
While I am so many.*

## Multilevel Growth Process

Source: Michael M. Piechowski. (1992) Giftedness for all seasons: Inner Peace in Time of War. In N. Colangelo, S. G. Assouline, & D. L. Ambrosio (Eds.) *Talent Development. Proceedings of the Henry B. And Jocelyn Wallace National Research Symposium on Talent Development*. Unionville, NY: Trillium Press, pp. 180–203.

### Excerpts from

*An Interrupted Life. The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-43.*  
New York: Washington Square Press, 1985

### A split between “what is” and “what ought to be”

*So many inhibitions, so much fear of letting go, of allowing things to pour out of me, and yet that is what I must do if I am ever to give my life a reasonable and satisfactory purpose.... I am accomplished in bed, just about seasoned enough I should think to be counted among the better lovers, and love does indeed suit me to perfection, and yet it remains a mere trifle, set apart from what is truly essential, and deep inside me something is still locked away.... I seem to be a match for most of life's problems, and yet deep down something like a tightly-wound ball of twine binds me relentlessly and at times I am nothing more or less than a miserable, frightened creature, despite the clarity with which I can express myself. [pp. 1–2].*

She felt “inner chaos,” inner forces “at loggerheads” within her, depression, and inner obstruction.

*I long for something and don't know what it is. Inside I am totally at a loss, restless, driven, and my head feels close to bursting again.... And this morning everything seemed fine again. But [later] there it was back, all the questioning, the discontent, the feeling that everything is empty of meaning, the sense that life was unfulfilled, all that pointless brooding. And right now I am sunk in the mire. And even the certain knowledge that this too shall pass has brought me no peace this time. [pp. 18–19]*

*I must work on myself some more, there's nothing else for it. A few months ago I did not need all this effort, life was so clear and bright inside me and so intense.... But now everything has ground to a halt, except for a bit of agitation, though it's not really agitation, I'm too depressed for that. (pp. 24–25).*

### Inner Conflict and the Work of Inner Transformation

*I have become just a little stronger. I can fight things with myself... I had the desperate feeling that I was tied to him and that because of that I was in for an utterly miserable time. But I pulled myself out of it although I don't know quite how. Not by arguing with myself but by tugging with all my mental strength at some imaginary rope. I threw all my weight behind it and stood my ground and suddenly I felt that I was free again.... And the lesson I learned is this: thought doesn't help; what you need is not causal explanations but will and a great deal of mental energy. [Pp. 29-30]*

*It is a slow and painful process, this striving after true inner freedom. Growing more and more certain that there is no help or assurance or refuge in others, that the others are just as uncertain and helpless and weak as you are. You are always thrown back to your own resources. There is nothing else. [p. 56]*

*I have gradually come to realize that on those days when you are at odds with your neighbours you are really at odds with yourself. [p. 66]*

She made an effort to listen to her inner voice, to follow her own rhythm, and live in accordance with it:

*The only certainties about what is right and wrong are those which spring from sources deep inside oneself. [p. 75]*

*This year has meant... greater awareness and hence easier access to my inner resources.... And I listen in to myself, allow myself to be led, not by anything on the outside, but by what wells up from within. It's still no more than a beginning, I know. But it is no longer a shaky beginning, it has already taken root. [p. 81].*

Within that year ETTY became less upset over her setbacks and relapses, instead looking upon them as a measure of her growth: "It is a good thing from time to time to feel the emptiness and the weariness in yourself for a moment or two, just to recall how things used to be and how they are now" (p. 104). Later she said, "one must have the courage... To feel empty and discouraged" (p. 242). The change was toward greater confidence in her inner direction, stronger sense of her deeper self, more profound inner peace, a deepening sense of the meaning of life, and an encompassing love.

### ETTY's Transpersonal Consciousness

*The rottenness of others is in us, too. I see no other solution... than to turn inwards and to root out all the rottenness there. I no longer believe that we can change anything in the world until we have first changed ourselves. And that seems to me the only lesson to be learned from this war. That we must look inside ourselves and nowhere else. [p. 87, February 19, 1942]*

*Each of us must turn inwards and destroy in himself all that he thinks he ought to destroy in others.... Every atom of hate we add to this world makes it still more inhospitable. [p. 222, September 22, 1942]*

*Ultimately we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and reflect it toward others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will be also in our troubled world. [p. 229]*

*Through suffering I have learned that we must share our love with the whole of creation. Only thus we can gain admittance to it. But the price is high: much blood and tears. But all the suffering is worth it. [p. 154]*

*Why is there war? Perhaps because now and then I might be inclined to snap at my neighbor. Because I and my neighbor and everyone else do not have enough love. Yet we could fight war... by releasing, each day, the love which is shackled inside us, and giving it a chance to live. [p. 99]*

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## Multilevel Growth Process and Secondary Integration: Peace Pilgrim's Spiritual Growth

Excerpts from *Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words*.  
Santa Fe, NM: Ocean Tree, 1983.

*In the first place I discovered that making money was easy. And in the second place I discovered that making money and spending it foolishly was completely meaningless. I knew that this was not what I was here for, but at that time... I didn't know exactly what I was herefor. [p. 4]*

*As I looked about the world, so much of it impoverished, I became increasingly uncomfortable about having so much while my brothers and sisters were starving. Finally I had to find another way. The turning point came when, in desperation and out of a very deep seeking for a meaningful way of life, I walked all one night through the woods. I came to a moonlit glade and prayed. I felt a complete willingness, without any reservations, to give my life—to dedicate my life—to service. "Please, use me. Take all of me!" I prayed to God. And a great peace came over me. I tell you, it's a point of no return. After that, you can never go back to completely self-centered living. [p. 71]*

This decisive moment was an act of will and of surrender. She called it "the first hump of no return." A new phase opened:

*And so I went into the second phase of my life. I began to live to give what I could, instead of to get what I could, and I entered a new and wonderful world. My life began to become meaningful. [p. 7]*

### Unshakable Inner Peace

For 15 years she worked with emotionally disturbed people. It was a period of inner conflict between the lower self and the higher self—the self-centered nature struggling with the God-centered nature, to start living what she believed.

*Then in the midst of the struggle there came a wonderful mountain-top experience, and for the first time I knew what inner peace was like. I felt a oneness—oneness with all my fellow human beings, oneness with all of creation. I have never felt really separate since.*

*I could return again and again to this wonderful mountaintop, and then I could stay there for longer and longer periods of time, and just slip out occasionally. Then came a wonderful morning when I woke up and knew that I would never have to descend again into the valley. I knew that for me the struggle was over, that finally I had succeeded in giving my life, or finding inner peace. Again this is a point of no return. You can never go back into the struggle. The struggle is over now because you will to do the right thing and you don't need to be pushed into it.*

### Inner Peace

*There is a feeling of always being surrounded by all of the good things, like love, and peace, and joy. It seems like a protective surrounding, and there is an unshakeableness within which takes you through any situation you may need to face.... There is a calmness and a serenity and unhurriedness—no more striving or straining. [Pp. 22-23]*

And there is an endless supply of energy. She remarked, that when she spoke, energy flowed through her "like electricity flows through a wire."

*We are all cells in the body of humanity. We are not separate from our fellow humans.... It's only from that higher viewpoint that you can know what it is to love your neighbor as yourself. From that higher viewpoint there becomes just one realistic way to work, and that is for the good of the whole. As long as you work for your selfish little self, you're just one cell against all those other cells, and you're way out of harmony. But as soon as you begin working for the good of the whole, you find yourself in harmony with all of your fellow human beings. You see it's the easy harmonious way to live. [Pp. 18-19]*

At one point she undertook a 45-day fast as a prayer discipline, to make her prayer for peace a continuous unbroken state of her consciousness:

*I had learned to pray without ceasing. I made the contact so thoroughly that into my prayer consciousness I put any condition or person in the world I am concerned about and the rest takes place automatically. [p. 73]*

To intervene, to help, to heal, she reached out:

*my divine nature reaches out—to contact their divine nature. Then I have a feeling of lifting them, lifting them, lifting them, and I have the feeling of bringing God's light to them. I try to envision them bathed in God's light, and finally I do see them standing and reaching out their arms bathed in golden light. At that point I leave them in God's hands. [p. 73]*

### Supreme Self-Awareness

She described herself this way:

*This clay garment is one of a penniless pilgrim journeying in the name of peace. It is what you cannot see that is so very important. I am one who is propelled by the power of faith; I bathe in the light of eternal wisdom; I am sustained by the unending energy of the universe; this is who I really am! [p. 126]*

She described her mission:

*My appointed work is to awaken the divine nature that is within. This is my calling, to open doors of truth and make people think. To arouse others from their apathetic and lethargic state, and get them to seek out for themselves the inner peace that dwells within. [p. 128]*

Again and again she stressed the supreme effectiveness of service:

*The motive, if you are to find inner peace, must be an outgoing motive. Service, of course, service. Giving, not getting.... The secret of life is being of service. [p. 17]*

## THE TRANSPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Nonseparateness: *We are all cells in one body of humanity*

The inner situation determines the outer: *Inner peace is the necessary condition of world peace*

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