

COUNSELLING AS A MORAL CONFLICT: MAKING THE DISINTEGRATION POSITIVE

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Abstract

The fact that counselling cannot truly be value free is generally accepted; the pendulum of developmental psychology is, in fact, swinging back to intense interest in "moral development" and "value clarification". As counsellors, we have a special opportunity to make this current interest in values more than a mere passing fad. By looking in greater depth at what goes on in moral education — the creative disequilibrium of moral challenge coming from exposure to higher levels of moral thinking — the disturbing consequences of facing up to the contrast between "what is" and "what ought to be" — counselling can take on new dimensions. The practical task of this paper is to look at the implications of moral and value education theory and techniques for counselling, particularly the demand they place on the counsellor to make the process a disintegrative one, leading to reintegration on higher levels of values and humanness.

Résumé

On accepte de part et d'autre que la consultation se rattache à des valeurs. De fait, la psychologie du développement entretient un intérêt grandissant dans la croissance morale et la clarification des valeurs. En tant que conseillers, il nous incombe d'assurer que cet intérêt pour les valeurs soit plus qu'un phénomène transitoire. Un examen en profondeur de ce qui se passe dans l'éducation morale — le déséquilibre créateur engendré par le défi d'une conceptualisation d'un ordre supérieur de la moralité — le tiraillement de constater la différence entre "ce qui est" et "ce qui devrait être" — interpelle la consultation à oeuvrer dans des domaines nouveaux. Cet article veut souligner les conséquences pour la consultation de la théorie et des techniques reliées à l'éducation morale et aux valeurs. Une de ces conséquences, c'est d'obliger le conseiller à franchir l'étape de la désintégration pour parvenir à une réintégration à un niveau plus élevé de valeur et d'humanité.

One could begin a paper such as this by documenting and celebrating the return of values as the proper concern of psychology. But this would be superfluous. The whole matter is history. Numerous studies and monumental works of men like Kohler, Piaget, Maslow, Kohlberg, Simon and Rokeach have convinced us of the place of values in a world of scientific "facts".

It would be merely platitudinous then, to simply infer from this that we as psychologists who counsel should likewise be interested in values; or, to put it another way, that we now admit that we have been dealing with values all along in our counselling and the only difference is that we can now do it openly, with respectability and a nod of approval from the pundits who decree what is proper psychology and what is not.

We should go deeper than that. It is the writer's intention to pull out some of the basic themes of what is going on, particularly in *developmental* psychology and especially the psychology of

moral development, and see what meaning this has for the role of the counsellor. Besides reading what the scholars are telling us about moral development, this paper will reflect some of the messages our clients are sending us about their needs for moral challenge.

The writer has just slipped in a loaded phrase: "the clients' needs for moral challenge". It contains, in essence, all of what the writer wants to get across. The fact is that counselling, if it is to be truly productive of human growth, must frequently involve some kind of moral conflict — a value crisis. The moral element may be evident in the client's problem and presented by him as a conscious symptom for which he seeks help. Or the moral crisis may be induced and structured by the counsellor. In either case, the role of the counsellor, as the above title implies, is to make this disintegration positive or growthful. Now that the writer has committed the stand that moral crises are not just to be accepted if they come but may actually be induced in counselling, four

things must be done: two theoretical and two practical.

1. The writer must prove somehow that this is how it should be.
2. The writer must show some way in which moral crisis can be induced.
3. The writer must indicate what he means by making the disintegration positive.
4. The writer must provide some practical guidelines for making the disintegration positive.

1. The counsellor as maker of moral crises

Developmental psychology has an important theme whether it is Piaget or Kohlberg, or Erikson or Dabrowski that is being read and it is this: that the qualitative development of the individual comes about through a process of disequilibrium, of challenging, of breaking down the lower level mental structures the individual already possesses and exposing him to ideas and feelings at a higher level. He reaches out for these to fill the void left by the rejection of his old ways which now seem so unsatisfactory in the light of higher levels of operation because they have an intrinsic appeal. This is the core of Piagetian theories of cognitive development. Kohlberg has modeled his moral development theory on Piaget and discovered through research (1963, 1964, 1975) that growth through his stages is induced by exposure to moral thinking one stage higher than the individual's current level of moral reasoning. There is, according to Kohlberg, an intrinsic attraction in that higher level of reasoning which lures the individual and has the power to draw him up to think at that higher level himself. Thus Kohlberg and his associates (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972; Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971) have worked out strategies for moral education that basically are structured discussion techniques, aimed at inducing discontent and dissatisfaction with one's current mode of moral reasoning by exposure to higher levels of reasoning. Moral growth, Kohlberg (1963, 1964, 1975) says, is the result of this technique, and the proliferation of hundreds of kits and filmstrips and moral dilemmas attest to the fact not only that publishers think they have found a good market, but that teachers and parents have felt a great need for help in moral education and have bought Kohlberg's concept that moral education is not accomplished by indoctrination in specific virtues so much as by a process built upon discussion of moral dilemmas. In the process of discussing a moral problem such as whether a man should steal a drug to save his wife's life, one is drawn into the task that is, according to Kohlberg, the essence of moral growth — role taking. In trying to find answers to moral dilemmas, particularly answers to the

question "why?" one is challenged to see the situation from another's point of view, to appreciate the conflict of just claims that often arise in real life, and to try to come up with an answer that best preserves the principles of justice for all; to treat other people as ends and not means; to treat them as one would wish to be treated oneself; to, in a word, put the golden rule into practice.

In such a discussion, one sees the deficiencies of his old ways of thinking; in other words, lower levels are disintegrated through the disequilibrium induced by the discussion. Higher level thinking has a chance to make its appeal; it moves in to fill up the void, and the person is drawn to the next higher level of moral reasoning.

Raths, Harmin and Simon (1966) and Simon and Kirschenbaum (1972), while holding a basically very different philosophy, have likewise gone strongly into a value conflict model for inducing "value clarification" through discussion of real life or hypothetical moral dilemmas. As with Kohlberg's technique, role taking plays an important part.

But the developmental psychologist to whom the writer is most indebted and whose ideas the reader will see cropping up (often unacknowledged) throughout this paper is Dr. K. Dabrowski (1970) with his theory of "Positive Disintegration". Most of the psychologists cited so far have fundamental and important differences from each other. The same is true of Dabrowski (1970) and Kohlberg (1963, 1964, 1975) for example, but, in keeping with the theme of attempting to trace some mainstreams of developmental psychology, the writer will continue to try to pick out some common direction — the convergences of current theories of human development and their implications for counsellors. It is remarkable how so many are coming to such similar conclusions from such divergent points of view.

Dabrowski (1970) considers crises, breakdowns, mental illness, as not necessarily being setbacks or retardants of development. On the contrary, he considers them as opportunities for development. Crises are in fact *necessary* for development because they provide the disintegration which permits reintegration on a higher level. Dabrowski (1970) sees the individual as being "multilevel" and development as a passage from lower or higher levels: from the most simple to the more complex and articulated; from the most automatic to the more voluntary; from lower levels to higher levels of consciousness and transcendence. The key to Dabrowski's (1970) theory is that passage from level to level does not come automatically by a simple process of maturation ticking away like some biological clock; nor does it come from mere socialization, from being exposed to "education".

No, it comes about through the challenges and crises that disintegrate lower level structures so they can be replaced by higher level structures, more complex, better articulated, and superior from all points of view including the moral. Once again, as with the other developmental psychologists seen, the growth comes from a certain disequilibrium created in the individual. But Dabrowski's theory is more holistic than Kohlberg's. Kohlberg's theory is a *cognitive* theory, limiting itself to the moral *thinking* of the individual. Dabrowski sees development and the crises that brings it on as occurring on all levels of the human psyche, physiological, sensory, cognitive and emotional. At all levels of his being, crises thrust upon the individual the opportunity to grasp the contrast between what things are and what they could be, between the level he is at and the higher level that attracts him, between what "is" and what "ought" to be. Although it is a general theory of development, Positive Disintegration is at heart a value theory (Hague, 1976). Once again, we are back at that pervading theme of development — disequilibrium the tearing apart of what is inferior and replacement with something better.

Really it is nothing new; the philosophers and prophets have been telling us for centuries that life comes from death, resurrection from agony. "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it brings forth a hundredfold." And nature had been telling us from aeons before, that springtime comes from autumn, that the giant redwood must crash to the forest floor and there disintegrate before the bright green foliage of new life can spring up from that which is dying but in its dying is life-giving.

2. *Inducing moral crises*

But the poetry and harsh beauty of the death-life cycle cannot grasp us totally. We must return to the "realities" of the counsellor in his office which may not even have a window to see nature going through her cycles. And as promised this paper presents some practical ways in which moral crises can be used for growth of our clients.

a) The first and most simple rule is not to avoid them when they come spontaneously. Some of us were taught as graduate students in our counselling classes to "keep hands off" moral problems that people bring to us. "They belong with the clergymen; refer the client to his priest or minister", we were told. And perhaps there is an element of truth in that when we are talking in terms of specific rules and regulations that have to do with religion. There perhaps your knowledge of the *specific* "oughts" that are troubling your client might run a little thin, and the information provided by someone who represents the faith

may be of help. But the basic moral issue is still the counsellor's domain.

What the writer is getting at is something that runs much deeper than specific rules, customs, mores, norms, — the source from which we get our rules, our values. Values are pervading, lasting principles — the bedrock that we sound out each time we need a specific rule to cover a specific situation. Values are much more basic and fundamental than rules, and in counselling that's where the action should be. And that's where the counsellor should have competence.

It is comparatively rare that a person comes to a counsellor asking what is already a clear value question for him like: "I'm wondering if I should accept the promotion; it will mean more money but more time away from home. I have to decide if money or time with my family is more important." There's a full-blown value crisis, obvious, compelling, maybe even threatening to the counsellor. And I guess my first point is for the counsellor not to refer it away because it's not his business. It is. How to handle it and make the crisis positive, we'll talk about in the last section of this paper.

b) But what about the moral problems that clients bring to us and want solutions for? Again, the distinction between specific behaviors and the values they express is important. The writer sees the counsellor's task as clarifying the values involved in the dilemma his client has. Once values are clarified, specific solutions to what to do flow naturally from them, when guided by principles.

c) But perhaps the most critical and most demanding is the client who comes feeling no moral or value problems at all. Here the task of the counsellor may be to bring about a crisis. And in talking about "inducing" moral or value crises the writer is not, like some do-gooder counsellors, encouraging you to hunt around in the client's psyche until you find a problem so you can solve it for him and feel good yourself as an angel of salvation. No, the real task of the counsellor is to point out the value conflicts, the inconsistencies, the lack of "virtue" (in its original sense of strength), to examine the sometimes cosmic contradictions in our lives between what we say and what we think, between what we verbalize and what we act on. The writer realizes that this involves having a sense of values in our own lives — being conscious of the values we do hold, and one cannot over-emphasize the importance that teachers (whether they be a parent or a teacher in a classroom or a counsellor), be conscious of what values they themselves hold. That is why the writer will again come back to this theme of consciousness of what values you hold, because you are teaching values whether you think so or

not. Better to be conscious of what you are teaching, than go on not knowing what you are conveying or not even admitting that you are conveying any values whatsoever.

The word "teaching" has been used in reference to values and it is not the writer's intention to give the impression that he is elevating the counsellor's chair into a pulpit or even a classroom podium. None of the research in moral education from Hartshorne and May (1928) to Kohlberg (1975) has indicated that there is much to be gained in moral development from imposing a "bag of virtues" as Kohlberg (1975) would call it on another human being, child or adult. Imposing specific moral rules does not constitute good education or good counselling for several reasons: first of all, it is highly situation specific and not much good for transferability to other occasions; secondly, it tends to be morally subjective, depending on the inclinations of the teacher and not on any enduring and objective set of principles; thirdly, imposing rules doesn't do much for encouraging human development and the great gift of free choice on which our humanness hangs, and finally, no red-blooded person with an sense of his own worth is going to accept a bunch of rules laid down for him by anyone even if that person does have a lot of parchment certificates and diplomas wallpapering his office.

The area where we, as counsellors, find most of our hidden moral conflicts which need to be brought into awareness, is in the realm of socialization versus individual choice; "keeping out of trouble" versus taking risks; taking care of oneself first versus a balanced concern for oneself in the context of other human beings; seeing oneself as only an individual versus seeing oneself as a member of a community; not trying because we might fail versus trying because we could never live with ourselves afterwards if we missed the moral opportunity. This is the basic moral movement from "is" to "ought". This is becoming something better than we thought we could be; this is moral self transcendence; this is what counselling can and "ought" to be doing.

Fear, regrettably, is probably one of our chief motivators. We do so much, or rather fail to do so much because we fear the consequences of commitment and involvement or possible failure. Counselling is a challenge to pick out the value conflicts in our clients' lives, confront them and risk exposing our own incongruencies, ambiguities and espousals of "values" which we never act on, and thus turn out not to be values at all. The counselling process is a two-way growth thing. Either client and counsellor grow together or we don't grow at all. Admitting you are hung-up on some value issues is no less a destruction of your position as a counsellor as is the admission

by a teacher that he doesn't have all the answers a destruction of his teaching position. It is honest, it is authentic, it is, above all, consciousness-raising for both counsellor and counsellee.

So, in summary, inducing value crises involves three things:

- i) Not imposing a bag of virtues on another human being.
- ii) Being insightful and aware of real value conflicts or conflicts of principles as opposed to merely dealing with specific rules.
- iii) Having the courage to bring them out into the open as opposed to letting them slide by for fear of getting out of our depth or exposing our own values.

The particular techniques you will use for approaching values issues will depend on your own theoretical orientation. Your approach will be idiosyncratic as is the rest of your counselling style. Making your particular approach growthful, making the disintegration positive is the task we should go on to now.

3. *Postive disintegration*

In many ways the group encounter movement showed us how to take people apart; too often it didn't show us how to put them back together again. Or rather, it didn't show us what kind of dynamics are essential so people can put themselves back together again; it is our task now to look at the kind of people and the kind of dynamics that encourage *positive* disintegration, not merely putting people back together again but helping them reintegrate on a higher level.

Dabrowski (1970) has five levels of development, beginning with low-level primary integration and ending with high-level secondary integration; between are three successively higher levels of disintegration, leading one up to the other. Like Maslow's self-actualizing person and Kohlberg's stage six person, few people reach the ultimate level of secondary integration, but those who do are characterized by high levels of autonomy, authenticity, self-control and objectivity; they have a clearly established hierarchy of values (a theoretical ordering of what is valuable) and a "hierarchy of aims" (they actually act upon their values). Those who are going through the processes of disintegration have these characteristics to some degree, and the successful movement up the levels of development is a result of the opportune collaboration of the traditional components of heredity and environment, plus the "third factor" Dabrowski (1970) speaks of characterized largely by elements of self-choice. Besides being the culmination of our genes and socialization, "we are our choices". It is the combination of these dynamisms including "education" which in its broader sense includes

counselling that is responsible for turning crises or disintegrations into opportunities for growth. The possibility, in fact the necessity, for some sort of disintegration before there can be reintegration on a higher level was mentioned earlier. It remains to be said now that three options are open to a client: they can remain integrated at a very low level and make very little if any progress in their lives; they can disintegrate and remain in a chronic and stagnant disintegration without growth; they can grasp the opportunity of disintegration and rise to higher levels of development. What makes the difference is the individual's sensitivity to himself and his environment — sensitivity that can be characterized in five types; psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual, and emotional. One would have to be trained in the complete Dabrowski (1970) system of diagnosis to understand and select individuals with these characteristics in a precise way. Yet, the counsellor, if he himself is aware, can sense the presence of dynamics in certain people which sets them apart, which gives them potential for positive disintegration — above all one can see in some clients an openness and courage to grasp an opportunity, to take up a personal challenge, not to blandly accept what a high pressure society shoves at them but to find their own way, not to be satisfied with the way things are but to find a "better" way, not to be tyrannized by neurotic "shoulds" but to positively pursue a growthful "oughtness" in their lives.

It is the functioning of these dynamics working in life crises that makes disintegration positive. Authentic education, and by that authentic counselling is included too, can provide these crises or at least guide them when they come so they can be positively growthful.

4. Making the disintegration positive

This brings us to our fourth and last point — guidelines for making the disintegration positive. It is easy enough to create negative disintegrations; we need only look at some of our families or schools or politics to see that in operation. Moral crises come from three sources: some from simply living out one's life cycle, adolescence is an example of that; others are accidental, a death in the family, the trauma of a divorce; others may never emerge except by some induced moral crisis. In a way this is what Kohlberg (1963) is doing with his hypothetical moral dilemmas or Simon (1972) with his value clarification exercises — creating situations in which one must make some choices about what he really values or thinks to be morally justifiable. And supposedly counsellors could use these dilemmas and games in their counselling much as they use tests or checklists or "sensitivity" games in groups.

But it seems we are looking for something more here than mere clarification, and certainly something more than leaving the client in a state of disintegration. We are looking for ways of making the disintegration, which either was there already and we capitalized on it or which we encouraged, into something positive, something saving and growthful. And this depends on two qualities — insight and courage. Insight particularly by the counsellor into himself to be conscious of his own hierarchy of values and hierarchy or aims; insight and sensitivity into his client to be aware of what developmental level he is at and what developmental potential there is within him. If the potential is not there in the client, all the good will and noble dreams of the counsellor will be frustrated. If the courage is not there in the client there may be no willingness to face a moral choice. And the moral choice must be faced in action — in actually doing something. It is too easy to verbalize high sounding sentiments and promises that will never be kept. But this is a mutual affair, counsellor and client searching beyond what *is* toward what *ought* to be. And if it is mutual it is done hand in hand; sometimes it means walking to the very edge of the cliff together. It is a risk, but so is every truly caring relationship. Let's look at some specific guidelines for making the disintegration of a moral crisis positive—growthful.

i) First, making disintegration positive demands an *understanding and an agreement* with the process. In counselling the writer has often found it helpful to talk about creative potential that problems hold. So often clients, in a myopic view they have of their problem, think they are unique. "Everybody else just seems to sail along through life." Or they wonder why they have been "cursed" with a problem. "Why me?" — pointing out that the problem may well not be a curse, but a unique opportunity for growth, not only changes your client's perception, but gives him a new zest to attack it in constructive ways.

ii) Secondly, making disintegration positive demands *self-consciousness* on the part of the counsellor — consciousness of one's own level of development, one's own habitual stage of moral reasoning, the real limits to which one can go and still be a guide who knows the way. No one can give what he hasn't got.

iii) Thirdly, a sincere *concern* for the welfare of the client — not playing power games with him. It would be tragic if a counsellor were to look on the idea of inducing moral crises as a kind of 'one-upmanship' or capitalize on a superior-to-inferior relationship. We'd be back full circle to the worst elements of a basically immoral relationship. Moral growth cannot come of that. The element of concern has another important dimension. It means that the counsellor sets as his goal the

ultimate independence of his client. Although a fairly directive role and emphasized teaching component in counselling has been sketched throughout this paper, it is always with the ultimate goal of creating independent moral reasoners, people who will be guided to discover and utilize their own dynamics for growth. That idea is at the very heart of both Kohlberg's (1963) and Dabrowski's (1970) theories which, by emphasizing principled thinking and behavior, encourage autonomy. Truthfulness and honesty go hand in hand with autonomy, justice and courage.

iv) The fourth quality essential for making the crises of counselling positive and developmental is *respect*. Respect in two senses: one for the limitations of some human beings; another for their potential. Handling moral conflicts and particularly introducing them into a counselling relationship involves a keen sensitivity for what the client needs, the boost that will get him started, and how much the client can take. Each person likely has an optimal level of conflict arousal below or above which little growth takes place. Kohlberg (1963, 1964, 1975) has given us some practical guidelines here when he says that a person is moved to development by moral reasoning one stage above his own.

v) A fifth characteristic of positive disintegration is "*challenge*". a) First a challenge to get outside one's own perspective, to role play, to see the problem from other people's points a view, whether it be to cognitively recognize the just claims of others in the Kohlberg sense, or to be able to have a subjective view of the problem from another's perspective combined with an objective view of oneself in the problem in the Dabrowski sense, which is to feel empathy for others and be moved to moral courage. Whichever it is, it involves the whole person, cognition and feeling — an ardent determination to look at facts, a hatred of inconsistency and irrelevance, a passion for truth. b) The second part of the challenge characteristic is to act — not merely to speculate or verbalize or espouse values, but to act on them. And here is one of the things the writer likes about Simon's contribution to valuing. He enumerates seven criteria for a value. If any one of them is missing, it is not really a value according to Simon. The writer is in agreement and thinks that a counsellor should demand action of his clients — homework assignments if you wish — before there can be any real growth.

vi) A final characteristic of the interaction of counsellor and client is that it must be *transcendent*. It must search for that broader horizon, that something beyond what we previously thought

possible. It must transcend the ordinary dimensions of consciousness, and seek out the deeper meanings in life. It must be concerned with ultimate values in the world and in the depths of oneself. And if this sounds religious and mystical it is only because it is. True religiosity is a mark of all who have reached higher levels of human development as is high moral sensitivity. The two go hand in hand. The conscious religious attitude constitutes one of the most powerful means of safeguarding ethically high-standing individuals against breakdowns in crises.

Providence has sprinkled history with individuals who exemplify what has been said, not only in this last paragraph on transcendence but throughout this paper. It has given us men like Christ, Gandhi, Thomas More, and Victor Frankl, whose personal agonies are living proof of the positive powers of moral challenge for creative integration.

This is a challenge not only to our counselling techniques but to our moral fibre as individuals and as a people who have been destined to live in critical times. The moral crises are there; the challenge to counsellors is to make them growthful.

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