

Theoros Sacer

- or how ideology abandons a theory-

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Abstract

In this paper I try to understand why Kazimierz Dąbrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (T.P.D.) (1964) has failed to be kept 'alive' after the death of its creator. Finding the theory to be sufficiently abundant in terms of its falsifiability potential to improve knowledge, I look towards possible cultural and political explanations in an attempt to explain its downfall. I argue that Agamben's theory of the Homo Sacer, specifically the mechanisms of sovereignty and exclusion it describes, explained well why a theory like T.P.D. would be abandoned, regardless of its scientific quality. I therefore argue that T.P.D. (among other theories of development) could be better understood through the concept of *theoros sacer* (concept proposed by the author).

Keywords: homo sacer, positive disintegration, self, developmental psychology, ideology, Agamben, Dabrowski

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Introduction

“Why are people taught to live and not to die? The one who does not know how to die will not know how to live. To value life above all is to miss its purpose - such a life becomes an error, a toy of external forces' ' (Dabrowski, 1937b, p. 68).

Out of the numerous developmental theories coming out of the first half of the 20th century, those of C.G. Jung, J. Piaget, and K. Dabrowski are perhaps the most innovative. I claim that, out of all these theories, Dabrowski's *Theory of Positive Disintegration* (T.P.D.) is the most eloquent in differentiating between the individual and the social-political factors that contribute to the development of the self. More importantly, its theoretical richness offers itself to a wide variety of research directions. Why, then, is this theory barely known to the western behavioral scientist? In the almost 60 years since its first translation into French and 40 years since its translation into English, K. Dabrowski's *Positive Disintegration* (1964) has yet to have been opened up, recontextualized, and transformed by the scientific community, en masse. My argument is that this is due to an inherent incompatibility between persistent ideological perspectives on individuality and Dabrowski's vision of the emerging self.

In this exploratory philosophical endeavor, I will first attempt to explain this incompatibility by first integrating the developmental models of J. Piaget, C. G. Jung and K. Dabrowski's within the context of a (European¹) history of ideas. Furthermore, I will make the case that, out of all these models, Dabrowski's understanding of the individual self is ideologically incompatible

¹ The entirety of the following analysis refers specifically to the European tradition of thought that canonized (neo)platonian, judeochristian and finally enlightenment values into a “perennial philosophy” (Unger, 2007, p.10). This distinction is meant here purely for practical purposes and does not follow a value judgment.

with every possible section of the classical political spectrum². I will try to demonstrate this position by showing how T.P.D., as both a psychotherapeutical model and a sociological one, interacted with the sensibilities of the Marxist-Stalinist, National Socialist and Neoliberal ideologies it historically encountered. Finally, I suggest that throughout the life of Dabrowski (and ever since his death) T.P.D. has consistently proved itself ideologically incompatible with European and North-American narratives about both individual and societal development. This proposition, that ideological incompatibility with the majority culture may lead to the scientific abandonment of a theory, will be looked at through the lense of *Theoros Sacer*, a mechanism that I propose based on the concept (and eponymous book) *Homo Sacer* suggested by G. Agamben (1995).

I will present my argument as follows. In the first section, I will place T.P.D within the larger European history of what we now term “Developmental theories”. I will proceed in section two with a study of the ideological paradox at the heart of theoretical descriptions of self . To do so I will discuss at length *Homo Sacer* and use its insights to sketch a picture of the cultural mechanism I propose moderates the level of scientific engagement with a theory. I will finish my thesis by returning to T.P.D. and underlining what unique traits, among all developmental theories mentioned in this paper, make it the most dangerous to the current and previous power structures.

² In "The Descent of Man " (Darwin, 1898, pp. 67–102) we read "that of all the differences between man and the lower animals the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important". Throughout history, this idea -that to be human one must have a capacity for moral cognition (language playing an important role in this) has been a constant of both developmental and political narratives about the self.

Section 1 - THE SELF IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

The discipline of developmental psychology has, as its main object of study, how the individual acquires and develops those elements of what is usually regarded as the self: moral cognition, personality, and identity (E. Burman, 2016). For us to understand the theory of Jung, Piaget and Dabrowski we must first understand the state of the art of developmental psychology at that point where their concepts were first being structured (Crain, 2015).

The “person” is a relatively new invention, not only regarding its legal status but also in regards to its inclusion into the collective vocabulary (Moore, 1971). According to some accounts (Ariès, 1960, pp. 71–72, 411), throughout the late medieval period, individuals were seen as fully established entities, more or less rigidly constituted, from birth to death. Children, as such, were nothing but miniature adults themselves. These *homunculi* (lat. for “little person”) were seen as essentially having the full cognitive instrumentation of adults, such as the seeds of morality, self-awareness, and practical skills needing just time to grow and become fully effective.

One of the main themes of the Enlightenment regarding cognition was the conception that a healthy human being must strive for mental autonomy and enrichment - “*Dare to know!*” (Kant, 1784, p.75). More importantly, the culture of this period privileged the state of independence from primitive impulses and considered inferior the path leading to less self-control and abandonment of reason. It is in this environment that the developmental insights of John Locke (1632–1704) took shape.

Locke shattered the long-standing belief in innate identity and knowledge. On the contrary, Locke envisioned a process of gradual development, the key motor of which is **experience**

within the living environment. The perspective that the environment exercises a fundamental influence on who an individual is, has since been inextricably linked to the study of developmental psychology. In this environmentalist paradigm the child is an autonomous agent that learns through the tools of a functioning, healthy nervous system. But where does the self manifest? Through a “superior” (locus of) control. Self-awareness, self-efficiency, self-determination are only possible through the ever increasing power of reason in relation to our more primal urges (Locke, 1690, 1693).

This central point is critical because it envisions the “ought” of both society and self. The individual should learn, through reason and self-discipline, to take command of his desires and society should be built in line with encouraging the individual towards this self-control. Foreshadowing Piaget, his educational philosophy took into account discrete stages of development, each with its own cognitive capacities and associated educational practices. More importantly though is the fundamental belief that the individual is in charge of their own development, and in this they are guided by an inner propensity towards **curiosity**.

Further insights on the development of the self came from the Genevan philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). Rousseau shared Locke’s focus on self-determination but dealt with the matter from the opposite conceptual standpoint. For Rousseau, the human being comes prepared with all the necessary components to foster the growth of its cognitive powers and the shape of its identity. Not embracing preformism, the philosopher's naturalist stance described a continuous development of the child based on their own unique potential. In this system, society works as nothing more than a hindrance that must be contained or at least gradually accessed. As such, nature replaces society as the main source of individual

development. The words with which he opens *The Social Contract* (1762a) can be seen as a clear expression of this stance- “*Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains*”. He shows a fundamental belief in human nature, in the infant's inherent capacity to grow, when left relatively to its own devices, into a rational, autonomous and moral being.³ Prefiguring both Piaget and Dabrowski, Rousseau offers us an incredible example of one of the first stage-base developmental theories of the western tradition. At its essence lies the principle of individual freedom. This freedom is seen as always existing in tension with modern society. Rousseau also made a valuable contribution with his quite visionary educational principles, which we might address as attempts at human (dis)engineering. The process described (*Emile*, 1762b) involves maintaining a social environment that is non-hierarchical, non-violent and that encourages a child’s inner motivation, above all other influences.

The arrival of the modern age increased the quality of the empirical process and the end of the 19th century saw multiple scientists deal with the problems of human development in a much more methodical way. It might be relevant to enumerate some of the more striking theoretical breakthroughs of this period.

Jung

The theories of the psychiatrist Carl G. Jung (1875–1961) are often presented in the context of his friendship and collaboration with Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the founder of psychoanalytical school of thought (Glover, 1991). The two, having found in each other kindred spirits through the importance they invested in the unconscious, enjoyed a few years of close collaboration and mutual admiration (Jung, 1961). However, Jung soon realized that Freud’s

³ Referring to the one suggested by Eysenck (1957).

insistence that the *libido* functioned as the only motor of inner development created a rift between the two (Crain, 2015, Ch. 17).

Jung moves forward with his own intuition, according to which the core dynamic of human growth is not one unique fundamental guiding energy - like the libido - but a complex weave of interacting forces of varied functions. In line with this weave individuals are said to develop multiple personas of which the ego, the conscious element of the mind, is often blind to. Underneath the ego lies, in turn, that immense collective of inner tendencies that were never embraced by a conscious self, a territory represented by what he called *the Shadow*.

In other words, for Jung the process of developing the self happens, for the largest part, innately. Moreover, the emerging self always risks being dethroned by the multiple passions lying dormant within the Shadow. Eventually, in later life, the clash between the conscious and unconscious becomes unavoidable and Jung predicts that this could naturally lead to a massive internal transformation. The individual must eventually reunify, through analysis, the warring aspects of the self and stabilize them into a symbiotic whole: that is, according to Jung, the one way an individual can awaken the true, unified self. This process, *individuation*, lies at the essence of Jung's developmental theory. And this is, arguably, an important shift from previous theories of development. First and foremost it talks about a lifelong process through which the self matures and this maturation is never assumed to be fully completed. Second of all it describes a path through which individuals can reach higher levels of self-awareness, but that this path, far from being inevitable, is often not engaged with by most individuals.

However, from a social point of view, Jung's model begs the question of moral responsibility and it is fair to say that there is no coherent Jungian ethics (Mills, 2018). The process of individuation is a process of self-building but what type of behaviors that leads to is a matter of

discussion. Several thinkers have acknowledged that while Jungian ethics resembles Aristotelian ethics, in the sense that moral responsibility appears to balance inner and outer conflicts, it can only lead to a “do no harm” ethics.

Piaget

It wouldn't be precarious to claim that the person that had the most impact on the developmental model of the 20th century was Jean Piaget. Piaget decided relatively early in his career where his most poignant scientific interest lay. He wanted to create a bridge between moral cognition and its scientific basis. Piaget reasoned that this required a scientific foundation of epistemology - “*genetic epistemology*” (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988, pp. 2–3; Piaget, 1952): a study of how humans acquire knowledge and develop their cognitions. However, his most well-known theoretical model focused on the gradual cognitive development of the individual, from birth to early adulthood.

As the child grows through the successive modes of thinking, new cognitive challenges arise and with them a new paradigm through which to view not only self but the self's relationship to others. Between the stage of *sensorimotor intelligence* to the last stage of *formal operations*, the child's intellectual development often parallels the development of social and moral cognition. Piaget's stage theory asserts that as the child grows through successive modes of thinking, new cognitive challenges arise, engendering novel paradigms to view the self and its relationship to others. In *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932) he explains that as object permanence and perspective-taking are not already part of an infant's internal processing, the youngling can not be expected to behave more altruistically. As these capacities increasingly develop at their

own pace, the child reveals a (more) complex self. This self is **heteronomic**. Non-mediated egocentric motivations are followed by the blind following of rules and trust in the authorities. However, this trust is seen as a necessary, pragmatic point towards social coexistence. It is only around the age of 10 that children start to relativize and become aware of controlling their own value system. This is the beginning of moral **autonomy**. Therefore the child starts by seeing everything as self, continues by adapting to social customs for egocentric reasons and finally starts actively engineering his own value system. This distinction will be of immediate relevance to understanding our last theoretical model.

Dabrowski

At this point, in the interwar period, Dabrowski enters the scene of psychiatry, as he attempts to develop a model that encompasses both the study of the healthy development of the infant and the sphere of psychopathology. Dabrowski's practice will be thoroughly addressed in the next section, but it would be relevant, for now, to present the main points of the theoretical model that became his life's work, The Theory of Positive Disintegration (T.P.D.) (Dabrowski, 1964).

Through his work he introduced 3 radical ideas into the school of Polish Psychiatry:

1. Strong negative emotions can work as motors of psychological development.
2. The human being has an inherent need to suffer, to disintegrate, and this disintegration also propels its development.

3. Most human beings develop healthy intellectual and emotional lives without being fully aware or in control of themselves. Through positive disintegration they can develop their autonomous personalities .

One must understand that, when compared to Jung or even Piaget, Dabrowski's main practice was that of a practitioner within psychiatric institutions, dealing with a very traumatized clinical population, working under the constant pressure of war, regime changes and political repression (Nelson, 1992; Piechowski, 1992). He was imprisoned two times and was one of only a handful of Polish psychiatrists that survived the second world war. However, the three thinkers are obviously closer related to each other than to the Learning Theorists. And all three of them had existentialist interests and generated knowledge from sources deemed unreliable for western science. Why then, out of all these theories, out of which Jung's model was undeniably the most unfalsifiable, did T.P.D. become less known, less popular and less engaged with by the scientific community? The answer, as we have suggested, lies within the narrative of the self.

The Context

In the early 1920s Dabrowski was studying medicine in Warsaw under the guidance of another important name in the history of psychiatry, Jan Mazurkiewicz. He would develop his concept of autonomous forces under Mazurkiewicz' guidance (Dabrowski, 1964, p.xii), while focusing on the phenomenon of auto-mutilation. The young student used his first experience as an intern to meticulously observe disadvantaged children that showed this behavior. Having already studied philosophy and literature, Dabrowski started building a holistic theoretical model

with the single aim of helping individuals who face psychopathological processes. During the following decades of clinical practice a theory of development started taking shape. Its cornerstone principles were those of psychological growth through suffering and psychoneuroticism. Overexcitables, (those individuals that showed a higher degree of neuro-somatic reactivity) were the population best suited to study how this growth organizes the conscious self.

In 1931 Dabrowski had founded an institute in Warsaw for “nervous, retarded and disturbed children” (Battaglia, 2002, p.65), and he worked there as a psychotherapist. By 1937 he had already developed a comprehensive method aimed at creating the conditions for overexcitables to prosper. It served not only as a clinic but also as a center for education and reintegration, hosting lectures for teachers, medical professionals and interested parents (p.70).

What follows this formative period can be looked at as examples of the most violent aspects of sovereignty. With the start of the Second World War, the country became ravaged at every level of society. There were now, obviously, more trauma and mental health issues to go around but the works of the Institute were soon to be dramatically interrupted. At the core of the Nazi belief system lay the idea that all individuals who could not give back to the Reich were considered subhuman. This included the mentally disturbed or disabled (as well as those charged with their care) (Battaglia, 2002, p.76). During this period Dabrowski saw his life’s work destroyed, his colleagues murdered, he himself was jailed, tortured and almost executed. By the end of the war the little mental hygiene institute he had managed to build was completely destroyed, most of his colleagues had been killed and a large part of his research had been confiscated and burnt (Tillier, 1998).

The immediate postwar period saw him go back to establishing a sustainable psychiatric infrastructure in Poland. By 1948, the Institute was working again and already had a network of branches and dispensaries working around the clock. Some of the most important (surviving) Polish scholars joined the Advanced Studies program to study mental health from the direction of a wide variety of disciplines (from biology to political economy) (Dabrowski E., circa 1980, p.6). However, in 1949 his institute was closed down again. His works were again confiscated, the Association for Mental Hygiene was disbanded and he, his wife and many of his colleagues were imprisoned.

After a period of stagnation 1956 saw him restored again to a position in which he could finally focus on his vision of preventive psychiatry. But this process was also sabotaged by an establishment that in reality did not have any desire to support his work (Battaglia, 2002, p.92).

An ideological compromise seemed to be the only way out. This was easily managed after his 1964 book was published in English and Dabrowski became known to his Western colleagues. The communist authorities would have been, obviously, happy to get rid of such a problematic thinker. He and his family answered an invitation by the Ministry of Health in Canada and despite his most honest wish to remain and fulfill his lifelong project, Dabrowski left Poland.

The Theory

Within the T.P.D., impulsivity lies at the core of all people. People end up respecting societal rules and obeying laws, but not out of any moral cognition but out of their basic instinct of self-preservation. However, through the triple action of genetics, the environment and the loosely

defined Third Factor, some individuals have an increased chance of successfully completing positive disintegration. This implies a radical shift in one's inner world and developing a range of mental qualities and skills that range from understanding complexity, a dispersion of the ego and stable self-awareness.

This is done, successively, through the processes of (primary) disintegration of their previous personality structures. Pain, psychological distress and existential confusion are essential to this transformation. The process of disintegration arises from a pre-existing psychoneurotic predisposition. Those young people in which the disintegration happens incredibly violently and (relatively) quickly manifest a characteristic Dabrowski calls overexcitability. In overexcitable children there is marked sensitivity to external and internal stimuli. These children prove to be extremely sensitive (sometimes to the point of physical pain) not only to physical stimuli (f.e. too strong or high-pitched sounds) but to affective stimuli as well (manifested through words or touch) and, most importantly, through a great amplification of their own inner experiences and thoughts. An aspect of this pre-disintegrating phase is that it is marked by a tendency towards either introversion or rapid-cycling periods of of introversion followed by short bursts of extraversion, reflecting a dynamic of growth-related asymmetry. More importantly, however, is the fact that these children are often highly creative, have a strong sense of imagination, aesthetic appreciation and are often found talking to themselves or with imaginary friends.

This introduction of the major concepts being concluded, we finally come to the positive disintegration process itself. What actually ignites the original crises varies. It might be a simple maturation of already developing ideas and psychoneurotic tendencies. Most often though, the young person encounters a reality, either through an unavoidable personal crisis, an unannounced and often traumatic event or even through something as seemingly benign as watching a war

documentary with your family. The hard truth discovered - of a great injustice or a tragic aspect of the human condition - ignites in the individual a shattering of their previously integrated value system. The individual is not just heading towards a new, yet unknown horizon, their previous certainties are also crumbling beneath their feet and with it, any sense of safety or orientation in the void. At least for the time being there can be no hope, just the pure experience of utter aloneness, of total alienation from the self and the world. The author calls this state the “night of the soul” (Dabrowski, 1967, p.327). Here Dabrowski recognizes his association with Kierkegaard’s concept of dread (1884, collected 1978). This is considered essential for the germination of the Object-Subject Process which constitutes a sign that a person is “equipped” for disintegration. Dabrowski believed this was the origin of the whole neuro-transformative process of Positive Disintegration. From here, the situation should develop with ease. Before the pre-desintegrated individual reached their present crisis, they were ruled by simple, purely selfish, emotions. In turn, most of their intellectual functioning was serving the goals of simple social integration (as with keeping social customs and achieving desired resources). Through the emerging crisis, the object-subject process igniting disintegration, both thinking and emotion become incredibly intense and disordered. Finally, in the best case scenario, a stable, more complex range of emotion develops and subsumes thinking through implementation of a value-hierarchy. These individuals start building a new value system on which they can better negotiate their relationship with the world. As such, their cognitive dissonance decreases and they achieve a state of secondary multilevel integration. Their psychoneurotic dimensions are not gone, but they are converted into dynamic forces with further increase the depth of their thoughts and perceptions. Hopefully, this system will also lead them to engage in value-based meaningful work and raise sympathy between themselves and others. However, disintegration doesn't just

change the moral cognitions of man and his ability to adhere to a self-made value system. It revolutionizes thinking itself. It allows the integration of complexity dynamics of many types. It, first and foremost, creates an ever increasing awareness of self and the capacity for autopsychotherapy which, in turn, leads to great insights in regards to other people's struggles. "Progression through the levels is dependent upon increased reflective awareness (consciousness) of moral and ethical situations as well, if not even more importantly, of the other. Empathy is key." (Battaglia, 2002, p.23)

Within the developmental science of his time, the Polish psychiatrist innovates through his three factor model. While the First and Second Factors refer to external influences on psychodevelopment, i.e. (epi)genetic and environmental, the Third Factor refers to the autonomous self, as it guides its own development). The origin of the Third Factor lies in Hughling Jackson's (1884) model for the growth of the human nervous system. The three factors guide neurological development from the simple and organized to the more complex and disorganized, so from lower to higher levels of organization. This happens through an inherently painful process that the Polish psychiatrist calls disintegration.

No other developmental theories of his time dared to consider that an individual could willingly use his own psychological processes to counteract (better said guide) both the influence of their genetic make-up as well as those of their nurturing environment. Yet, in T.P.D. it is exactly this third factor that gives rise to this autonomously-developed self. Theoretically, anguish, disquietude and a legion of other strong emotions could, in moments of crisis, fuel lasting inner change. Once a certain point has been accomplished, multilevel integration assures the stability of a being that is, truly, an individual (not easily guided by ideologies or external morality) but also always being wholly dedicated to helping and serving others. However,

Piaget's guiding principles were always leading the child towards equilibrium. T.P.D. on the other hand requires constant conflict for the progression of a “healthy” psychic system (Battaglia, 2002, pp.29-30)

Now that we have presented, in brief, the contents of T.P.D. as well as the political context in which it grew , I shall now present the it through the prism of Theoros Sacer.

In truth, Dabrowski mirrors other thinkers in the tone and theme of his work, among which we already discussed Jung with his drive to individuation and Piaget’s notion of heteronomy. We shall enter in more detail with Dabrowski’s model in the following section, however we shall first need to address the ideological relationship between developmental theories and political power.

Section 2 - Ideology and science

Homo Sacer

Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1995) builds on Foucault's *Lives of Infamous Men* (1954), as it tries to investigate the core of this political and cultural phenomenon. What is gained by the polis when life itself is excluded? The inherent personal privilege most urban-dwelling people have is self-evident: that they continue existing in a community that adheres to (and is willing to defend) a set of values and rights it considers fundamental. Agamben therefore gives the example of the Sacred Man in the Roman Empire. *Homo Sacer* is a human being that is devoid of civic status. These persons are excluded not only from the legal protections given to full Roman citizens, but even by those laws regarding the treatment of enslaved people. *Homo Sacer* could legally be killed on the spot and was thus considered lacking any personhood. Crucially, it was also forbidden to sacrifice such an individual - for to kill ritualistically would mean to purify any guilt attached to the immortal soul and then offer that soul to the gods. Both laws of men and laws of gods made sure that a *Homo Sacer* had no substantial outer self that could act freely upon the world and no inner self that could be given hallowed passage to the afterlife. The essential point Agamben makes here is this: *Homo Sacer* are not sacred because of their exclusion. Rather, their exclusion is what keeps society sacred, in the sense that only through identifying what is not part of it can a political body understand what it, itself is. There is ample historical evidence that this mechanism of social exclusion was extremely common in many ancient and medieval European societies and that it served key functions of maintaining pre-existing power structures

(Bickermann, 1972; Derrida, 2002; Jordan, Leyser and Kantorowicz, 2016). But what lies at the basis of this exclusion dynamic? For Agamben, this basis is sovereignty.

Sovereignty

"Sovereign is he who decides on the
state of exception"

(C. Schmitt, 1993, p.20)

The core of Agamben's thought is the pervasiveness of sovereignty in modern society. Sovereignty is the principle (and power) that decides who and what is excluded (*"exceptiō"*, lat., Agamben, 1995, p.7) from the common rule of society. The exception is visible, paradoxically, in the figure of the classic sovereign itself, leading Agamben to the most startling conclusion- "the law is outside itself" (p.15).

Agamben's proposal is that, as humanity took over the untamed natural world and converted it into an urban civilization, sovereignty supposedly also became ever more covert. In other words, the more individual human beings relied on the *polis* for their material resources and safety, the more they allowed the sovereign principle to take over their autonomy. Significantly, they also became less capable to recognize that loss⁴. But if this is *what* sovereignty does, what remains to be explained is *how* it excluded.

⁴ This has led to a state where humanity's capacity to reimagine (and, eventually, change) the political paradigms it lives under is inhibited and diverted to a plane of constant distraction, also referred to by other writers as the "society of the spectacle" (Debord, 1967). Of course, while you have the spectacle, you also cease, more and more, to be able to refer to what is "outside" the spectacle. The cultural dynamic of *exceptio* has nowadays become a homogenous global trend.

To suggest a possible mechanism, Agamben underlines an important distinction made within the first philosophical discourses of the European canon. In his *Politics*, Aristotle refers to the related (yet distinct) terms of *zoe* and *bios*. While *zoe* signifies the “simple fact of living”, *bios* refers to a superior, political life (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1944, 1278b, pp. 23-31). This initial dichotomy might very well be **the cultural origin of the western civilizations’ legacy of exception**. *Zoe* must enter the urban and become *bios*, committed life with the understanding that it was the political life’s responsibility to remove, as much as possible, external suffering and internal disruptors, and to slowly expand its reach.

In the modern era, global capitalism needed a docile, predictable *zoe* for its new stage of development and, presumably, it promised an unprecedented level of material abundance and innovation in exchange of that predictability. Modern medical and social sciences take a leading role in this pursuit, as manifestations of a more ‘naturalized’ sovereign power, which simultaneously enables helping people at a scale never seen before in human history as well as torturing or murdering them in ever more sophisticated ways (Foucault, 1994, p. 188). Of course, for this sovereign power to continue to grow it must keep those within it highly dependant on its continued survival while excluding those that risk to become autonomous. Thus *zoe* must be highly controlled and limited, while *bios* becomes increasingly incapable of escaping outside of the city.

This artefact of human life without *bios*, “**bare life**” (for it is bare of the signs of personhood) must not be allowed to disrupt the harmonious functioning of the *polis*. But were to abandon⁵ all this bare life? In an ancient society, anything outside of the city gates, its

⁵ From the old germanic term that means to exclude from the community and, at the same time refers to the insignia of the ruler. The etymology of the word reveals the cultural universality of the homo sacer archetype, at least in the indo-european sphere. The other word with ban at its’ root is that of the bandit people who are forcibly left outside the community. This gives us another way of imagining homo-sacer. Man and al, nature and the city, roaming the dangerous territories of the extra-political. Arguably, in today’s society most human beings are homini sacer, werewolves, due to bios escaping in the city itself

accompanying roads and farmlands, was considered wild and would have been the place bare life could return to. But now? With most of the planet highly urbanized and the natural world tamed? Zoe must find a way to escape within the city, for there are, so to say, no more gates. This can be seen, for example, in the historical example of the three ideologies that dominated the political landscape of Europe. It could be claimed that these ideologies allowed the collective bios from within the community to be transformed into a tool of death, pointed at whoever must be excluded (from without as much as from within). A bubble of Zoe thus bursts, triggering the humanitarian catastrophes of the Fascist and Stalinist regimes (Agamben, 1995, p.132).

After all, as the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes pointed out “the Subjects did not give the Sovereign that right; but only in laying down theirs, strengthened him to use his own... / ... it was not given, but *left* to him, and to him only” (Hobbes, 1991, p. 214).

Theoros Sacer

To understand the mechanism of exclusion that I suggest characterizes a *Theoros Sacer* it might be necessary to address one last aspect of Agamben’s theory, that of image replacement. In the second part of his work the philosopher analyzes another obscure manifestation of ancient greco-roman rituals. The *colossus* is a wax or wooden sculpture , made to resemble a devotee that has recently died or is soon expected to. The object serves to separate the individual into two distinct bodies. One body, the wax figure, is that of the city and must be ritualistically reunited through a burning sacrifice with the gods. The other body, that of flesh and bone, the body of

through neoliberalism, consumerism, identity politics and other processes of subjectivization. In similar ways most theories have no choice but to follow their subjects (pun intended) and become theoroi saceri, condemned to haunt dusty shelves of central-european libraries.

“bare life” is summarily discarded⁶. The point of this ritual is, according to Agamben, to assure that *sovereignty* remains uninterrupted. The urban being clean and orderly goes in and out of the *nomos*, the unpredictability of *bios* being completely accounted for. But what happens to the person that, for whatever reason, is still biologically alive? That person, outside of the ground, living and distinct from the colossus is *homo sacer*. In this state we discover a “paradoxical being” (Agamben, 1995, p.99) in that the *zoe* is torn away from the political body. Such a person is truly an abandoned figure, the *ghost* of any political or ontological narrative. But can the same concept, referring exclusively in Agamben’s interpretation to the political human being, refer to humanity’s epistemological pursuits and scientific in particular? Does knowledge also have two, distinct, bodies?

Agamben suggests that, as societies became more urbanized, the fundamental dynamic of *exclusio* reveals itself in every social institution, especially in the scientific and academic ones (Agamben, 1995, p.122). If scientific institutions also fall under the influence of sovereignty, they might inadvertently become mediums through which bare life is actively excluded. If the scientific process can be influenced by the economic, cultural and ideological systems that make up the social reality of the scientists themselves, it may be that the knowledge produced will also reveal (through exclusion) a *theoros sacer*. I therefore make the case that some scientific theories can generate the very knowledge that is particularly dangerous to *bios*.

Perhaps in support of the view that scientific institutions can and are influenced by sovereignty, we can also look at ideas originating from the discipline of the sociology of

⁶ In one more extreme example (p.95) the dead, biological body of some medieval french kings had already been buried while the religious ceremony focused on the colossus. Through it the political being is still considered alive, albeit on its dying bed (slaves tend to it and doctors consult it as though of flesh and blood).

scientific knowledge. Within this domain sociologists study the processes through which a scientific community develops and is maintained, as well as the social, economical and political forces that affect the way it does science (Bloor, 1991). One of the founders of the field, David Bloor, addresses the subject of ideology and its relationship to science in *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (1991). Bloor's main point could even be read as a possible corollary of the Homo Sacer theory: "The law which is at work here appears to be this: those who are defending a society or a sub-section of society from a perceived threat will tend to mystify its values and standards, including its knowledge."(p.78). If there is an overarching mechanism that causes scientists to "mystify" the values and processes at work in their community, the same mechanism would be expected to exclude the values and processes that pose a direct threat to its existence.

Such knowledge will presumably be condemned to either total obliteration or partial diffusion. In the latter case, it may be uprooted from its historical context then exported selectively. Thus corrupted, it will end up serving the leading ideological landscape. However, if a theory cannot be converted and pacified, it slowly becomes forgotten, condemned to haunt the "wild" spaces outside the scientific establishment.

Crucially, I suggest that developmental theories are more sensitive to expulsion from the scientific norm than fundamental sciences, as they address the main dynamics of who we are, how we grow, and the nature of the communities we form. To name just one example, a sovereign, threatened by a potential disturbance in the social order, might initially resist replacing a geocentric model of the universe with a heliocentric one. Soon, he will discover that his power is not radically overturned by an astronomical model. Such models concern purely abstract concepts and are not likely to affect the relationship between individuals and the state. As such, the ideological background adapts to incorporate this new paradigm. In contrast,

developmental narratives target the essential power dynamics of human communities (Foucault, 1984, pp. 32-50).

So if the only way of understanding knowledge that is *in exceptio* is to deal with a theory before it reaches the level of ideological excrecence it seems a fitting point to address the theory of Positive Disintegration within its now political historical context.

T.P.D. as Sacer

It perhaps would serve as a good starting point in this endeavor to list here the three main theoretical characteristics that made T.P.D. stand out from amongst other developmental theories of its time. However we shall formulate these characteristics in a language more suited to the socio-cultural insights of Agamben's *Homo Sacer*:

1. Autonomous-led growth
2. Individual growth is not organized by time (or indeed by any other universal quanta) but by the emerging individual complexity. Moral Autonomy, far from being a given, is a long-term developmental goal.
3. Individual development does not require external sovereignty, indeed it benefits from distancing itself from it. A community of loved ones, peers and benevolent guides just gently support the individual experiencing the hardest parts of Positive Disintegration, keeping them from the cliff of despair.

So, let's look at the three principles of T.P.D. stated above and connect them to some statements from three radically different ideologies:

“The first obligation of every citizen must be to work both spiritually and physically. The activity of individuals is not to counteract the interests of the universality, but **must have its result within the framework of the whole for the benefit of all**” (Pauer-Studer, 2020) *The 25-Punkte-Programm of the National Socialist Party of Germany*

“To organize society in such a way that every member of it can develop and use all his capabilities and powers in complete freedom and **without thereby infringing the basic conditions of this society**. “ (Engels, 2017) *Draft of a communist confession of faith*

(Referring to the spread of communism.) “The group holds that these developments have been .../... fostered by a decline of belief in private property and the competitive market; for **without the diffused power and initiative associated with these institutions it is difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved**. (Thus, it) is of the opinion that further study is desirable inter alia in regard to the following matters: .../... the creation of an international order conducive to the safeguarding of peace and liberty...” (The Mont Pelerin Society, 2023) *Statement of aims*

In all three of these statements there is the promise of *Bios*. Human labor is to be directed by the needs of the city (“framework of the whole”) and human development constrained to the

pathway that assures the harmonious functioning of the state as a whole. Of course, in case of the last fragment mentioned above, sovereignty is, in the case of neoliberalism, the most discrete, but all three exercise a familiar dynamic. In all cases *zoe* is turned into *bios* as a necessary condition for the foundation of the modern state. Rights and liberties are given through an automatic exclusion of anything that goes against this social contract: as, for example, any phenomenon that infringes “the basic conditions of society”. In the case of The Mont Pelerin Society this amounts to insufficient “belief in private property and the competitive market” (The Mont Pelerin Society, 2023, Statement of Aims).

The essence of Agamben’s thought suggests that a model like Dabrowski's could potentially reverse a fundamental Foucaultian dichotomy - “The Western state has integrated techniques of subjective individualization with procedures of objective totalization” (Foucault, 1994, p.229 in Agamben, 1995, p.5). Specifically, T.P.D. could help create:

- an individual that does not also have to be politically sterile (because he is capable of moral cognition and free-thinking)
- a community that does not depend on the excrescence of *zoe* to survive (because it is not built on sovereign control)
- an ontological paradigm that learns to embrace chaos, complexity and multilevelness.

It is worth noting that the explicit beliefs within different political ideologies are irrelevant. For instance, the nazi's could potentially discredit T.P.D. because their ideology finds repugnant an individual with a strong autonomous empathic response, not subsumed to the Nation or Fuhrer. The communists would, obviously, discredit T.P.D. because it explicitly

proposes a path of individualism. The neoliberal position, presumably, wouldn't be explicitly opposed to T.P.D. . After all, western contemporary society is not at all against empathy and actively promotes individualism. However, its understanding of individualism is strongly related to capitalism. As such, contemporary society risks being profoundly disrupted when individualism and a richly developed moral cognition are shown not only to be linked but necessarily leading one towards the other, as this developmental model suggests it does. The sovereign limits in this case are obvious: produce, consume, repeat. Disintegration cannot, by its very operational definition, be capitalized. In reality, in an age where all of us are homini sacer, no active discouragement whatsoever is required. The culture of exception (or its rationalistic equivalent, causal reductionism) is within all of us the moment we acquire the language to describe it.

After all, going back to Agamben's words in the last few pages of his book:

“This biopolitical body that is bare life must itself instead be transformed into the site for the constitution and installation of a form of life that is wholly exhausted in bare life and a bios that is only its own zoe.” (Agamben, 1995, p. 188)

Conclusion

In the end, any scholar of abandoned developmental theories might ask themselves: could a theory survive if it ultimately suggested that autonomous moral growth is not only possible, but natural? For is it not the exact purview of the City and its sovereign to offer safety and an ethical existence to the members that constitute its body?

“ *ginomene men oun tou zen heneken, ousa de tou eu zen*, born with regard to life, but existing essentially with regard to the good life" (Agamben, 1995, p.3)

Arguably, a more immediate disruption to the establishment might be that individuals who develop their personality in a completely independent and unpredictable manner would lead to a constant state of excess and instability. More than anything, such theories directly threaten the core of western politics, representative democracy, as it questioned the autonomy of the moral judgments of most individuals.

If these theories would be allowed to guide practice - either through policy making, educational reform or clinical interventions - they would lead to the young being driven to conflict and instability in order to grow, while the fully developed would, by their very nature, firmly reside outside of Nomos.

If we accept the possibility that sovereign power actively discourages certain lines of research, those it finds to be threatening to the status quo, then T.P.D. might be considered the most dangerous developmental theory that has ever been formulated.

Of course, some developmental theories would not threaten the model very much (their narratives about the self would allow for bios to be neatly transformed into zoe). For example even psychoanalysis (considered to adopt a deconstructivist approach) has sometimes been used to discredit the individual's capacity for moral autonomy (Althusser, Gillot and Rendall, 2016) and as stated in Chapter 1 Jungian individuation makes no claims regarding a new political identity. On the side of the more empirically-backed models, the Cognitive Behavioral School, though not offering a developmental theory per se, is built, from its very foundation, with the intent of "correcting" distortions of thinking, feeling or behaving that develop in the individual as they mature (Dobson and Dozois, 2010). It might be seen, from this point of view, as the most efficient biopolitical tool to come from the directions of the behavioral sciences (explicitly trying to transform neurotic *zoe* into harmonious *bios*). Even a model that was, for a time, developing in parallel to T.P.D., Abraham Maslow's Transpersonal Movement, focused on the "peak" experiential states while completely disregarding the idea of moral autonomy or socio-political engagement (Boucoulas, 1999). Hence, the attention given by the scientific community to the major developmental theories would remain unconstrained. Afterall, regardless "where" the developmental pathways lead the individual - either towards getting lost in self-analysis, "corrected" by C.B.T., or pushed towards self-actualization by Jung, Maslow and others, no such developmental pathway suggests Dabrowski's understanding of individuality. Some voices have gone as far as to suggest that it is this very abundance of competing developmental narratives, none of which envision necessary political implications, that contributes to the existential anxiety of contemporary existence (Polivy and Herman, 2002). Anything that goes against this paralysis is what really activates the full defence mechanisms of the Nomos, triggering a process of gradual excision. Whatever does not survive remains as Theoros Sacer. One must consider

that, in some ways, all developmental theories mentioned in this paper have gone through this splitting process - with Piaget's incomplete translation and appropriation or with Rousseau's full thought being filtered to suit the needs of post-revolutionary France.

Dabrowski's arrival in North America was supposed to offer T.P.D. the political and economic stability that it never enjoyed in its endemic land. It soon became clear, however, that the promise of a psychology of positive disintegration would, at least in this case, yield no spectacular results. Of course, he did for a time experience great popularity, although only within a narrow band of the academic world, but few researchers were willing to invest in a full-scale empirical study to support his hypotheses. His death, in 1980, also marked the end of the most productive chapter in Positive Disintegration, despite previously stated hopes:

“The author (Dabrowski) wishes to emphasize once more his feeling that while clinical studies are quite advanced, experimental research with regard to this theory has not yet progressed enough. The author is convinced that the majority of problems and hypotheses presented here will undergo substantial modification. He will appreciate it as an expression of the fact that this theory is “alive” and that it will be included in the creative process of transformations and perhaps become a marginal element within some future more complete, wider theories as well as the subject matter of creative work of individuals better prepared for this task” (Dabrowski, 1970, p.xi).

To be sure, throughout the last few decades, T.P.D has been referred to in the studies of human development that focus on “nonlinear dynamics” (Laycraft, 2011). In other words, it proved to be quite an efficient lens to use when understanding the extreme ends of human

behavior, both psychopathology and giftedness, as well offering an unmatched model to tie the two together, under a relatively simple set of basic mechanisms (Mendaglio, 2008). However, with all his self-awareness and most humble of hopes, 40 years after his death, the bulk of his theory is still dying. Not dead, not alive. But Sacer.

Many of the practical difficulties of studying T.P.D. in the 70s have since been much alleviated by the development of new technologies and statistical methods, as the study of post-traumatic growth shows (Calhoun, Tedeschi, 2014) but I suggest that no methodological impediments are relevant in the question of T.P.D.'s abandonment.

To conclude on a more hopeful note, I hope that, if anything, this thesis has managed to argue for a need to change how we see the role of the “self” in the behavioral sciences. More importantly I hope it outlines a possible mechanism for the enslavement and corruption of the scientific community as a whole. From Rousseau’s fundamental belief in the inherent potential of each individual to become a fully autonomous being, to Dabrowski and Piaget’s projects, the fight for *bios* becoming its own *zoe* continues today in the developmental sciences. While it remains unsure if Dabrowski’s model will ever be made “alive”, the theory of *Homo Sacer* shows that it is only through the application of a similar theory of development that society could start nurturing personal autonomy in its members to oppose the status-quo, the *nomos*.

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