



Emotional Development and Emotional Giftedness

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Searching for a Model of Emotional Development

Different Senses of Emotional Development

This chapter addresses the characteristics of emotional development of gifted children and also gifted adults. Emotional development does not stop in adulthood; on the contrary, it can be all the more intense. It might be helpful, therefore, for the parents and the teachers of the gifted to find case examples and theoretical models with which to compare their own experiences.

What constitutes the domain of emotional development is far from clearly defined. How do emotions develop? How does the understanding of emotions come about? What is the role of socialization in shaping emotions? How does early emotional experience influence later life? These are some of the questions that address different aspects of emotional development. The list that follows identifies representative approaches to emotional development. However, what is most applicable to our understanding of emotional growth of gifted and talented children *and* adults will take us beyond this list. Approaches include emotional development as:

1. *The development of emotions:* This approach is the most basic. Its task is to follow the emergence of different emotions in the child's expressive repertoire as well as the emergence of the ability to recognize emotions in others (Hesse & Cicchetti, 1982).

2. *A step-by-step parallel to Piaget's stages of cognitive development:* Piaget (1967) and other authors (Harter, 1977; Hesse & Cicchetti, 1982) have made attempts to show how children's understanding of emotions in one-

self and in others, as well as their ability to deal with complex and mixed emotions, follows the stages of cognitive development.

3. *A function of socialization:* Here emotional development is conceived in terms of skills and tasks of self-management, self-reward, interpersonal competence, and the development of self-concept. This is the standard approach in textbooks on child development.

4. *Psychosexual development:* In the classic psychoanalytic approach, emotions are the function of the sexual and the aggressive drives. They are governed by the pleasure principle: the desire to reduce or eliminate unpleasurable affect (Sandler & Sandler, 1978).

5. *A series of psychosocial challenges:* These are deciding milestones when facing life's developmental demands, for example, whether to trust or to mistrust, whether to be industrious or feel inferior and avoid challenging tasks, whether to partake of intimacy or lapse into isolation. This is Erikson's theory of how each individual's sense of self develops in meeting a succession of critical social and personal tasks (Erikson, 1963). The self develops in terms of a sense of mastery and competence, intimate relations with others, and personal identity. All are emotionally significant areas.

6. *Extension of attachment theory* (Bowlby, 1969, 1973): The initial bond between the baby and its caregiver is the foundation of emotional life that subsequently grows out of the original attachment pattern (Sroufe, 1979). Attachment as a framework for emotional development lays emphasis on the reciprocal interactions between the child and its caregivers. This is where one's sense of significance and worth is formed and maintained. The theory explains particularly well the long-term effects of loss of attachment figures, the devastating effects of

loneliness, and difficulties in relationships with others as a consequence of injury in the development of early attachments (Bowlby, 1980; Parkes & Stevenson-Hinde, 1982).

7. *Self-actualization*: Maslow's (1970) theory of self-actualization is a speculative scheme of a hierarchy of human needs. The lower needs are for physical survival, safety, love and belonging, and self-esteem, and the higher needs are for self-actualization. Maslow thought originally that satisfaction of lower needs prepares the realization of higher needs. Self-actualization would then appear within easy reach of anyone fulfilled in terms of self-esteem and all the other lower needs. Maslow realized later that there is nothing automatic about self-actualization.

If there is one feature that knowers of giftedness agree on, it is the tremendous range of individual differences in children and adults of exceptional ability. No standardization and no norms are valid here. The approaches listed present generalized models of emotional development. They apply to the gifted as they do to all children. There is, of course, room for adapting general models, such as Piaget's or Erikson's, to the gifted. In this manner Clark (1983) adapted Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the specific developmental needs of gifted children. However, the general models and their adaptations do not directly address the outstanding features that are characteristic of the emotional development of the gifted.

There is one model that does address characteristics of the gifted: Dabrowski's theory of emotional development. Dabrowski's concept of developmental potential addresses a core of personal characteristics that distinguish the gifted in a most pronounced way. His idea of levels of development provides a broad framework for understanding the making of emotional giftedness and self-actualization.

Before introducing the theory let us first address the emotional intensity and sensitivity of the gifted and Dabrowski's concept of developmental potential. We shall then consider emotional giftedness as a phenomenon for which Dabrowski's theory provides a proper place. Self-actualization is another phe-

nomenon that sits well in the framework of Dabrowski's theory. The question of the relationship between emotional giftedness and self-actualization then follows.

For understanding the emotional development of the gifted and talented, the significance of the theory can be put this way:

1. Dabrowski's theory helps to make sense of the individual experience of turmoil, self-doubt, self-loathing, desperate search for meaning, feeling different, and feeling weak, unbalanced, irrational, self-critical, and too sensitive and too intense at the same time.
2. The theory identifies methods of coping with the troubled cauldron of overexcitabilities (to be explained) and presses to resolve conflicts arising from positive maladjustment (to be explained), from self-judgment, or from the search for a deeper meaning of one's life.
3. The theory shows the connection between emotional giftedness and self-actualization and restores the latter to its original meaning.
4. The theory provides a set of concepts that are helpful in understanding and guiding multilevel development (to be explained).
5. The theory has generated research on personal growth, self-actualization, and giftedness.

The Concept of Developmental Potential

Emotional sensitivity and emotional intensity are often cited as distinguishing most gifted children, and the highly gifted especially (Barbe, quoted in Clark, 1983, p. 104; Silverman, 1983; Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982; Whitmore, 1980). These characteristics account for their vulnerabilities in childhood (Roedell, 1984) and get them into trouble at school (Richert, Alvino, & McDonnel, 1982). Seeing themselves so different from others, they begin to doubt themselves. They ask themselves, What is wrong with me? (Tolan, 1987) and look in the catalog of mental disorders for the appropriate label to apply to themselves.

Dabrowski (1967, 1972) studied the mental

health of intellectually and artistically gifted youths. He took the intensity of their emotions, their sensitivity and proneness to riding a roller coaster of emotional extremes, as part and parcel of their psychophysical makeup. Creative individuals as a rule live at a level of intensity unknown to the rest. Rather than view this as neurotic imbalance or the brink of insanity, he saw it as a positive potential for further growth.

Dabrowski's concept of developmental potential includes talents, special abilities, and intelligence, plus five primary components: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional (Table 21.1). Conceived broadly as five dimensions of psychic life, these components have many possible expressions: *psychomotor*—an augmented capacity for being active and energetic—expressed as movement, restlessness, drivenness; *sensual*—an enhanced differentiation and aliveness of sensual experience; *intellectual*—avidity for knowledge and the search for truth—expressed as discovery, questioning, and love of ideas and theoretical analysis; *imaginational*—the power of thought creation—expressed through vividness of imagery, richness of association, liking for the unusual, and a facility for dreams, fantasies, and inventions; and *emotional*—the heart—recognized in the great depth and intensity of emotional life expressed through a wide range of feelings, attachments, compassion, heightened sense of responsibility, and scrupulous self-examination. These five dimensions to a varying degree give talent its power (Piechowski, 1979, 1986). They may be thought of as modes of experiencing or as channels of information flow that can be wide open, narrow, or barely present. Dabrowski called them *forms of psychic overexcitability* to underline the enhancement and intensification of mental activity much beyond the ordinary. Overexcitabilities contribute to the individual's psychological development, and thus their strength can be taken as a measure of developmental potential. Our interest here lies chiefly in the emotional dimension.

When gifted people, and those who live and work with them, are introduced to these concepts there is often an instant recognition and

a sense of relief. It helps to find out that there is a theoretical model that makes sense out of a manner of feeling and acting that is so often at odds with normal behavior and expectations of happy—or grim, as the case may be—adjustment. It helps for once to feel legitimate in one's "abnormal" reactions and what one cannot help experiencing and wanting to express.

When I was a teenager and read about manic-depressive disorder, I announced that finally I knew what was wrong with me. Of course, I was told that all teenagers are manic-depressive to a modest extent, but I knew I was connecting with something more than that—and it has followed me ever since—both the pain and the joy of the world are often too much to handle. A good therapist finally pointed out to me that I wouldn't give up being able to write my novels so I should quit trying to drive out of myself the very qualities that made me able to write them. "Easy for her to say," I thought. She didn't have to live with being crazy. Imagine my joy at having this craziness referred to as "channels of information flow" and "modes of experiencing"! (Tolan, personal communication)

The stronger these overexcitabilities are, the less welcome they are among peers and teachers (unless they, too, are gifted). Children characterized by strong overexcitabilities are often made to feel different, apart from others, embarrassed, and guilty for being different. Criticized and teased for what they cannot help, they begin to believe there is something wrong with them. Sometimes they learn to disguise it, sometimes they seek refuge in fantastic worlds of their own creation, and sometimes they try to "normalize" it and suffer in consequence the agonies of those who deny their own potential (Maslow, 1971).

Giftedness in the Affective Domain

Intensity and Emotional Sensitivity

The intensity of emotional reactions, especially in children, may sometimes be difficult to understand, especially when they strike seemingly out of the blue and the child is strongly upset over "nothing." It requires considerable patience and knowledge of the child

Table 21.1
Forms and Expressions of Psychic Overexcitability

Psychomotor

Surplus of energy:

Rapid speech; marked enthusiasm; fast games and sports; pressure for action; delinquent behavior

Psychomotor expression of emotional tension:

Compulsive talking and chattering; impulsive actions; delinquent behavior; workaholism; nervous habits (tics, nail biting)

Sensual

Sensory pleasures:

Seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing

Sensual expression of emotional tension:

Overeating, masturbation, sexual intercourse, buying sprees

Intellectual

Probing questions

Problem solving

Learning:

Curiosity; concentration; capacity for sustained intellectual effort; extensive reading

Theoretical thinking:

Thinking about thinking; introspection; preoccupation with certain problems; moral thinking and development of a hierarchy of values; conceptual and intuitive integration

Imaginational

Free play of the imagination:

Illusions; animistic and magical thinking; image and metaphor; inventions and fantasy; poetic and dramatic perception

Spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension:

Animistic imagery; mixing of truth and fiction; dreams; visual recall; visualization of events; fears of the unknown

Emotional

Somatic expressions:

Tense stomach, sinking heart, flushing

Intensity of feeling:

Positive feelings; negative feelings; extremes of feeling; complex feelings; identification with others' feelings

Inhibition (timidity, shyness)

Affective memory

Concern with death

Fear and anxiety

Feelings of guilt

Depressive and suicidal moods

Relationship feelings:

Need for protection; attachment to animals, significant others; perceptions of relationships; emotional ties and attachments; difficulty of adjustment to new environments; loneliness; concern for others (empathy); conflict with others

Feelings toward self:

Self-evaluation and self-judgment, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority

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to see that this "overreaction" comes from the child's sensitivity and need for his or her own order of things to be preserved. That children need order and predictable routines is common knowledge. To a sensitive and intense child who may be disequibrated often by his or her own emotions, departure from something routinely expected, for example, the way a story is told, may be extremely upsetting simply because the need for support is all the greater. The strongest support, without doubt, is the parent's loving patience and acceptance.

To illustrate how emotional intensity and sensitivity are experienced, a few examples will be given. These expressions form part of an *Inventory of Emotional Style* (Piechowski, unpublished). The items of the inventory were constructed, without much change, from written responses of subjects who answered the overexcitability questionnaire (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984; Piechowski & Cunningham, 1985; Piechowski, Silverman, & Falk, 1985).

Positive feelings take the form of being "flooded by unexpected waves of joy" or feeling "incredibly alive—every cell, muscle, etc., feels stimulated. I have incredible energy then and hardly need any rest," or, "Sometimes I can be so happy that I want to laugh and cry or be silent and shout, all at the same time." Beautiful music or beauty of nature can move a person to tears. Barron (1968) found this to be a particularly frequent occurrence for creative people. Occasions that others miss or find merely pleasing are to these people intense unforgettable experiences. For some exceptional individuals even pain has another dimension. Again to quote one of the subjects: "Even the greatest pain that I have felt has been ecstatic and full of life." Religious and spiritual experience can overtake such persons completely just as they are capable of communion with nature or merging with a painting or a piece of music. It makes one wonder if what the world really needs today is but a good dose of emotional overexcitability or intensity.

Emotional intensity has been studied by Larsen, Diener, and Emmons (1986), who developed an affective intensity measure. (This measure could probably serve well as a measure of emotional overexcitability.) Intense in-

dividuals experience their emotions quite strongly. They are emotionally reactive, and often their emotions soar high and dip down into the dark depths. Individuals lacking in intensity experience their emotions mildly and with only minor fluctuations. The degree of intensity of emotional response is a stable individual characteristic and quite independent of what actually evoked the emotion. Emotional intensity, or its lack in unemotional people, is a characteristic of temperament that can be observed early in life (Larsen & Diener, 1987). According to Larsen and Diener, individuals characterized by high intensity of emotions lead more complex and more interesting lives.

Emotional sensitivity is another matter. Emotionally intense individuals can also be very sensitive—sensitive to the feelings of others, sensitive to others' being hurt, sensitive to injustice, but also sensitive to criticism and pain. There are children and adults for whom to see, in reality or on the screen, someone being physically hurt is more painful than if they were injured themselves. Grant (1988) reports the case of a man who could not bear to watch the Three Stooges because of the hitting and hurting.

So far we have no systematic studies of emotional sensitivity, but there is an accumulated wealth of clinical material. If an emotional child grows up with too much criticism and ridicule, the child then begins to protect himself or herself by emotional withdrawal. A more enduring protection is to form an inner shield, but the price is high. The result is loss of emotional vitality, lack of enjoyment of one's successes and achievements, and lack of a sense of who one is.

When a child responds to a psychological instrument that asks about his or her feelings of joy, sadness, or anger and how strong they are, we do not know if the answer, "I am never particularly happy or unhappy" is an expression of a temperamentally unemotional child or of a child who has suffered an emotional trauma that led to walling off of feeling. It is a matter that urgently calls for attention and further study.

Alice Miller (1981) describes in her book *Prisoners of Childhood* (republished as *The Drama of the Gifted Child*) how she traced in

her psychoanalytic clients the process of emotional self-denial. She found that the emotional sensitivity and intelligence of gifted children make them well attuned to the feelings and desires of their parents. As they naturally want to please them and be of help to them, they may muffle the call of their own potential and instead become what their parents want them to be. In the extreme case the roles end up being reversed. The child becomes the emotional caretaker of the parent because the parent still demands to be mothered or fathered. The younger the child, the heavier the burden and the more serious the consequences developmentally. Gifted children caught in this process lock away their own feelings and desires. In adulthood they begin to feel a curious emotional void, a loss of sense of self that was never their own but an acquired one to suit someone else. (A case of a gifted boy who won much recognition in school for his academic and athletic achievements but at the age of 30 found himself adrift is described by Piechowski [1987].)

Miller's book has been an eye-opener to a great many gifted adults who have found in it their own life story. Reading it has led some to seek therapy, and with good results. It has to be made clear that coming upon these insights helps to identify the problems but does not remove them. Emotional problems of this nature, developed in the course of a long relationship that distorted the emotional design of secure attachment and trust in one's parents, cannot be successfully corrected by oneself alone. It is necessary to relive the significant moments that precipitated the emotional blocking and come into ownership of one's feelings and one's self. A task of this magnitude and intensity can be carried out only in the security of the therapeutic alliance with a psychotherapist who has the requisite knowledge and experience in this particular process.

The Case for Emotional Giftedness

Annemarie Roeper (1982, p. 24) raised the question of emotional giftedness as an innate capacity:

Can a person be emotionally gifted?

I believe there are people who have such a gift. They are the people who have the capacity to integrate their emotions, intellect, and creativity against enormous odds. They are people who deal realistically with life and move normally through their developmental phases. I have observed children who are particularly sensitive toward their own and to other people's feelings and who dare to act upon this awareness.

Some gifted children show enormous empathy with others, surpassing at times the compassion of adults who are more limited by society's expectations. As a result, adults may not understand a child's reaction. For example, during a chess tournament, John, the obvious winner, began to make careless mistakes and lost the game. When asked what happened, he replied, *I noticed my opponent had tears in his eyes. I could not concentrate and lost my desire to win.* John's empathy was greater than his ambition. Many adults, especially those who supported John, were disappointed. Yet, one could argue that his reaction was a more mature one than theirs for his self esteem did not depend on winning the competition [emphasis in the original].

Such examples of empathy, unselfishness, and consideration for others are readily found among gifted children if one looks for them. Seymour (1987) describes two brothers of whom the older at age 7 was accelerated from second to fourth grade. Everyone was impressed by this boy's exceptional intelligence and verbal facility. His brother, a year younger and also highly gifted, was by contrast considered "average." The older boy's imagination and sensitivity to others were less spectacular than his intelligence. He had a violent temper and often hit his brother who, though younger, was the larger of the two. The younger brother did not strike back but would rather walk away; despite his anger and obvious pain he controlled himself, and he was only 7 years old. On a school trip to the zoo this very young boy, unlike his classmates, showed a concentrated interest in every animal. And he very much wanted to feed the goat. A couple leaving the zoo asked him if he would like to have a bag of corn they were carrying. Seymour says that she expected him to take the corn and head for the goat display. Instead, he came up to his

classmates and offered everyone corn, and when the bag was almost empty he went to see the goat. Seymour found this attention to others to be a consistent trait in this boy. From responses to her parent questionnaire, Silverman (1983) collected numerous observations of emotional sensitivity and compassion in highly gifted children as young as 2½ and 3.

Considerateness, compassion, and understanding of others are characteristics of what Gardner (1983) called *personal intelligence*. Actually Gardner made a strong case for two personal intelligences: intra- and interpersonal. Among the eight criteria for according a domain the status of separate intelligence, one is the evidence of exceptional talent and achievement. In the case of personal intelligences, the evidence is an outstanding degree of self-knowledge, moral leadership, and inspiration to others. The core capacity of *interpersonal* intelligence is "the ability to notice and to make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular, among their moods, temperaments, motivations, and interactions" (p. 239). The core capacity of *intrapersonal* intelligence is "access to one's own feeling life—one's range of affects and emotions: the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings, and eventually, to label them . . . to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's own behavior" (p. 239). Clearly, it is easier to observe someone act with compassion and sensitivity to others' feelings than to see a person's self-knowledge. Developmentally, we would expect empathy and concern for others to come first. Empathetic acts—responses to another's distress and a desire to soothe—have been observed in infants (Borke, 1971; Hoffman, 1979). The capacity for empathy and unselfish acts is common in preschoolers (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983).

The fruition of intrapersonal intelligence is a highly developed sense of self that does not depend on winning recognition, winning over others, or other such external boosters. Neither does it depend, as in Roepers' example, on being loyal to one's supporters. Gardner (1983) mentions Socrates, Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, and Eleanor Roosevelt as those excep-

tional individuals "who appear to have understood much about themselves and about their societies and to have come to terms successfully with the frailties of the human condition, while at the same time inspiring others around them to lead more productive lives" (p. 252). Guided by humility, compassion, and understanding, their conscience is a reliable guide. But it is one thing to point to such luminaries and quite another to describe how they got to be who they became. What is their talent and how did it develop? How was it trained? If we are to look for what makes for "outstanding talent and achievement" in the area of self-knowledge, considerateness, and compassion, we must, as in other talent areas, look for the trainers, teachers, and guides. Our interest here is in the inner realm, the knowledge of self and of one's feeling life.

In the case of Socrates and Jesus Christ, the teachers and guides are unknown. We have to allow for self-instruction, for the person being his own teacher, or having an internal teacher such as the inner voice, compassion, or the love of God. Brennan (1987) and Grant (1988) each have in their studies a detailed case of a person who was taught, as it were, by an inner voice.

In the case of Gandhi we find a powerful mix of Hindu tradition, the strong influence of his mother, personal distaste for dishonesty and untruthfulness, and the guidance of individuals whom Gandhi himself chose for their wisdom and purity of intentions. His goal was to live a life of truth so that he could find God. Practicing nonviolence (*ahimsa*) with utmost conviction and consistency was his method. He chose to be a lawyer, but he found it difficult at first to practice law, partly because of his paralyzing shyness, and partly because of the pressure to enter litigation and push to win a case. Later it became clear to him that what he must strive for was to bring the parties in conflict to a harmonious agreement in which each side could see its advantage (Gandhi, 1948/1983, p. 117):

I felt that my duty was to befriend both parties and bring them together. I strained every nerve to bring a compromise. . . . But both were happy over the result, and both rose in public estimation. My joy was boundless. I had learnt the true

practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder.

Gandhi as a child and as a man was a being of intense emotions and sensuality, great sensitivity, rich imagination, and relentless intellectual and spiritual inquiry. His emotional giftedness lay in his ardent concern to have no blemish on his character (punishment for an infraction caused him the greatest pain by the very fact that he deserved it), his ability to befriend people, his joy in serving others (he tells how he developed a passion for nursing the sick), and his dedication to abolish any kind of discrimination based on color, caste, religion, nationality, social position, or wealth. Other than his belief in the power of prayer, his devotion to truth as his guiding principle, and his sensitive conscience, we do not gain much insight into his inner growth. True; he struggled to overcome his crippling shyness and at times would spend a sleepless night to be able to come to the right decision, but his inner voice developed early, and as he wrote, he had taught himself to follow the inner voice: "I delighted in submitting to it. To act against it would have been difficult and painful to me" (p. 118). Still one gets the impression, and probably for lack of documentation a wrong one, that his "experiments with Truth" were the result of an early mold of character given to steadfast practice of chosen principles. Doubt, hesitation, inner conflict, all those things that appeal to our neurotic psychological tradition, are not in good supply in Gandhi's case. Nevertheless, he makes an eminent case for emotional giftedness.

By contrast, Eleanor Roosevelt's life brings us closer to discovering some of the methods she applied in her inner growth. Through her we get a close look at the inner workings of emotional giftedness. As a child and as a woman she was a being of intense emotions, great sensitivity, rich imagination, and thirst for learning. Her development, however, was not embedded in the rich soil of closely knit family affections as Gandhi's was. As a child she felt that only her father loved her, but she lost him early. Out of a serious, sensitive child

beset with numerous fears, feeling unattractive and out of place, she became a woman of energy and ability who impressed everyone by her serenity and poise. What were the main-springs of this transformation? A diary entry when she was 14 gives some indication of young Eleanor's striving to become a better person. After expressing her dismay at not being able to live up to an ideal, she wrote: "I can feel it in me sometimes that I can do much more than I am doing and I mean to try till I succeed" (Lash, 1971, p. 112).

The driving forces of Eleanor's life were a sense of duty, a desire for love and belonging, a willingness to be of service, and a determination to develop her individual identity on an equal basis with her husband. Above all, she was propelled by compassion toward those in need, whether material or emotional or to fulfill a personal goal. Because she made sense of the sorrows of her own childhood, she had a thorough understanding of the emotional needs of children and adolescents (VanderVen, 1984). In her last book, *You Learn by Living* (1960), she offers a surprising amount of insight into the tasks and methods of developing knowledge of oneself. These methods will be described in the section on Level IV and self-actualization.

Self-knowledge, she wrote, requires courage and discipline. She pointed out, too, our natural inclination toward self-deception ("protective veiling"):

You must try to understand truthfully what makes you do things or feel things. Until you have been able to face the truth about yourself you cannot be really understanding in regard to what happens to other people. But it takes courage to face yourself and to acknowledge what motivates you in the things you do.

This self-knowledge develops slowly. You cannot attain it all at once simply by stopping to take stock of your personal assets and liabilities. In a way one is checked by all that protective veiling one hangs over the real motives so that it is difficult to get at the truth. But if you keep trying honestly and courageously, even when the knowledge makes you wince, even when it shocks you and you rebel against it, it is apt to come in flashes of sudden insight. (Roosevelt, 1960, pp. 63-64).

Self-knowledge, she emphasized, also means knowing one's strengths, especially one's inner strength needed in times of difficulty. She stressed the necessity of taking responsibility for one's life: "In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility" (Roosevelt, 1960, p. xii).

Dabrowski's Theory

Positive Disintegration

Working toward self-knowledge is a way of forging an inner transformation. This is the core of Dabrowski's theory of *positive disintegration* (Dabrowski, 1964, 1967; Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977). By this paradoxical name he wanted to emphasize the dismantling and tearing down that occurs in one's inner being. What is experienced as lower is gradually removed and replaced by what is experienced as higher. This split between higher and lower in oneself takes many forms but is distinctly and spontaneously experienced by emotionally gifted people.

Earlier we discussed Dabrowski's concept of developmental potential. It addresses the outstanding feature of the gifted, their greatly intensified manner of experiencing in one or more of the five dimensions: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional. We discussed emotional giftedness as growing out of emotional overexcitability combined with a will to change oneself and to help others, including those who find roadblocks in the realization of their potential. The examples of Mohandas Gandhi and Eleanor Roosevelt underscore the link between a strong emotionality and finding one's mission in life in serving others. Not everyone finds it as readily as Mohandas and Eleanor did.

Dabrowski's theory is very much about this quest. It comes from a deep longing for something emotionally more satisfying: an ideal of love, an ideal of brotherhood, an ideal of beauty, an ideal of justice, an ideal of honesty, an ideal of caring, an ideal of responsibility, an ideal of humility, an ideal of truth, or all such

ideals. To be faithful to the call of an ideal demands self-sacrifice.

Gifted children feel this call early, but they find themselves as strangers in a strange land where schools do not value learning, where the ignorant hold power over sages, where the insensitive denounce feeling as a trouble factor, where victims are blamed for their misfortune, where authority gains its power from the blindness of the governed, where those who care always seem alone, and where reality means only the tangible, visible, measurable, and for sale. Clark (1983, p. 126) makes the point that an intense sense of justice and unwavering idealism appear early in the emotional growth of gifted children and that it is hard for them to understand why the adults are not doing anything to correct what is so blatantly wrong and unfair in the world. The gifted have trouble adjusting to a world where everything appears to stand on its head. In his youth Dabrowski struggled with these antinomies, and not finding resolution in the theories of his day, he eventually forged a new one.

Levels I and II

Dabrowski outlined a hierarchy, or typology if you will, of emotional development (see Table 21.2). Level I is represented by self-serving motivations, manipulateness, self-protectiveness, exploitation, and wheeling and dealing, where others are seen only as similar to oneself or, if they are not materialistic, greedy, ambitious, power hungry, or striving for status, regarded as weak and naive. Level II is represented by submission to mainstream values and conventions. In this case the self derives its definition from fulfilling the expectations that others hold for one. Elkind's (1984) term *the patchwork self* applies here. In this type of growth a person perceives an underlying sameness in people revealed in expressions like "Do your own thing" or "Everyone is entitled to his opinion." No one's values are perceived to be better than anyone else's (again a criterion of sameness but in value currency). Absolute values are rejected: "There is no absolute truth; everything is relative." What one subscribes to is the continuous flux of change

Table 21.2
Levels of Emotional Development

| | |
|-----|--|
| V | Life inspired by a powerful ideal, such as equal rights, world peace, universal love and compassion, sovereignty of all nations <i>A magnetic field in the soul</i> —Dag Hammarskjöld |
| IV | Self-actualization; ideals and actions agree: “What ought to be, will be”; strong sense of responsibility <i>Behind tranquility lies conquered unhappiness</i> —Eleanor Roosevelt |
| III | Sense of the ideal but not reaching it; moral concerns: higher versus lower in oneself <i>Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor</i> —Marcus Tullius Cicero |
| II | Lack of inner direction; inner fragmentation—many selves; submission to the values of the group; relativism of values and beliefs <i>A reed in the wind</i> |
| I | Dominant concern with self-protection and survival; self-serving egocentrism; instrumental view of others <i>Dog-eat-dog mentality</i> |

without much direction. In more sensitive individuals there may be further sense of inner fragmentation (“I feel split into a thousand pieces”). Personal growth in Level II is typically the struggle toward the emancipation of an individual sense of self, a struggle that can be quite heroic. To give up believing what one has always been told and accepted as truth is a radical step in an arduous process of reconstruction. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) in their study of women’s development identify a number of distinct steps in such a process.

Level III: The Fight for One’s Principles

Dabrowski developed his theory as a protest against a world upside down. If Freud explored the impersonal conflict between blind desires of the individual and prohibitions of society, Dabrowski explored the conflict in which the individual stands in judgment of himself or herself. The prelude to this process is surprise and astonishment with the world and with oneself. It is an awakening. When the idealism of youth gives way to compromise and assimilation to being like other people, as in Level II, something essential is lost. In *Resurrection* Tolstoy (1961) tells the story of Dimitri Nekhludov, a young prince who underwent

this unappealing change when he left home and, as was customary, joined the Imperial Guards.

Then he was an honest unselfish youth with a heart open to every good suggestion; now he was a depraved, accomplished egotist, who cared for nothing but his own pleasure. . . . Then he regarded his spiritual self as real; now the real was his healthy, vigorous, animal self. . . . And all this terrible change came about only because he had ceased to believe himself and placed all his confidence in others. . . . If a man believes himself he often has to give judgment against his lower self, which seeks easy joys, but when he puts his trust in others, there is nothing to decide; everything has already been decided against the spiritual self, and in favor of the animal self. Moreover when he trusted in his own judgment he was always blamed, whereas now, trusting others, he received nothing but the approval of those about him. . . . He had at first made a fight for his principles; it was a hard struggle, because everything that seemed right to him seemed wrong to other people; and vice versa, all that he regarded as evil was applauded by his world. The struggle ended in his surrender; he gave up his own ideals and adopted those of other people. (pp. 51–52)

Nekhludov ceased to be true to himself. Tolstoy illustrates here the vulnerability of

the young self in the face of the power of peer pressure in the largest sense. Young persons find peers not only in those who share their pursuit of "easy joys" but also in those with whom they compete, with whom they make deals and arrive at mutually profitable understandings and convenient arrangements. Thus one set of values overpowers another: one stronger merely by the number of people subscribing to it, one weaker because of germinating alone. And yet what is it about those "weaker" values and principles that they manage to come back? Or perhaps we should ask: What is it about these people who develop a strong reaction to having given up their ideals?

In Tolstoy's story, Nekhludov gradually recovers his earlier idealism and in the end firmly opposes the corrupt values of his society. Eleanor Roosevelt underwent a similar awakening when in her young adulthood she stopped, as she said, absorbing the tastes and personalities of those about her and affirmed her own values and beliefs: "They all in their sureness and absolute judgment on people and affairs going on in the world make me want to squirm and turn bolshevik" (Lash, 1971, p. 245). The phenomenon of an awakened self, or of an awakened conscience, is the phenomenon of conversion. But we must qualify that this kind of conversion comes from the inner being of the person. Dabrowski in his theory attempted to give systematic account of this process. First, there may be a reaction of surprise, or even of shock, when one takes a step back and looks at oneself, or, as Eleanor Roosevelt put it, "even when it shocks you and you rebel against it, it [self-knowledge] is apt to come in flashes of insight." Or, the process may be moved along by a gradual but ever deeper probing, self-examination, and self-evaluation, as illustrated in the life of Lieutenant Louis Font.

In 1970 a radio program, "Frontiers of Faith," carried an interview by Dr. Paul Deats, Jr., with Lieutenant Louis Paul Font of the U.S. Army. Lieutenant Font was then 23, a distinguished graduate of West Point (in the top 5% of his class). He came from a Kansas family steeped in strong traditions of "God and country." In 1967 to 1968, his last year as a cadet, he began having "twinges of conscience"

about the war in Vietnam. The words of the prayer that every cadet memorized and recited struck him "as life itself": "Give us sympathy for those who sorrow and suffer, suffer not our hatred of hypocrisy and pretense ever to diminish, guard us against flippancy and irreverence in the sacred things in life." He found himself in "the divisive situation of being in army uniform and objecting to the war my army was waging."

After graduation he was recommended for graduate study in the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, where one of his professors was Henry Kissinger. The war in Vietnam struck Lieutenant Font as immoral and unjust, but no one around him saw it this way. His classmates were mostly government officials and some military men, all older than he. Yet four months before getting his master's degree, he filed for the status of conscientious objector (CO). He sacrificed his lifelong dream of a military career and gave up earning his graduate degree. He felt that he had to file for CO status as soon as he realized that this was what he had to do because "it would have been insincere to wait. I would not even think of waiting." This was emotionally so compelling to him because it was congruent with everything he most strongly believed. It did not happen all at once. Prior to graduate school he did not have the time to do the intensive self-searching that this required.

Dabrowski called this process *positive maladjustment*, because such persons are in direct conflict with the values around them, which they are expected to adopt—this is maladjustment—but they come into congruence with their own deeply felt values, which is its positive aspect. Being true to oneself is a positive step in personal growth. Filing for CO status was Lieutenant Font's "decision for self," a decisive action taken on the path toward self-actualization" (Brennan, 1987).

Lieutenant Font's conflict was between his values and the actions of the government he served. However, one can be in conflict with oneself over one's own behaviors and proclivities. This is then an inner conflict, as Cicero expressed so well: "*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*" ("I see what is better and approve it, yet I follow what is worse"). The dy-

namics of inner conflict are expressed in dissatisfaction with oneself, even to the point of self-loathing for failing one's ideals, falling short of one's potential, perceiving oneself lacking in compassion, helpfulness, and so forth. Dabrowski called all such feelings engaged in judging oneself "multilevel," because a person feels a split between higher and lower in oneself. The pull of one's inner ideal is the higher element. This is not the customary striving after a *self-ideal*, which can be anything one desires in terms of attributes and achievements, but the universal ideal of becoming a better human being in the sense of Gandhi's truth, Eleanor Roosevelt's compassion in action, or Lieutenant Font's ideal of being to true to oneself.

Here then is the crucial difference between Levels II and III. While much attention may be given in Level II to self-improvement, inner growth is not conceived in multilevel terms of higher versus lower, the ideal versus the actual. The position of some dialectical developmentalists seems to focus exclusively on the Level II type of experience. In their view, the struggle between competing motivations does not lead to assimilation and integration at a higher level; rather the person cycles back and forth, responding first to one need and then another (Wrightsmann, 1988, p. 130). No truly integrated individual sense of self can grow out of chronic wavering, hesitation, ambivalence, and recycling of the same issues.

Awakening from that ushers in multilevel inner growth. Moral questions and issues of personal responsibility become important and are intensely felt. But not infrequently the isolation in which this leaves a youngster or adult makes him or her prey to doubt. A meaningful dialogue is possible only with those who have traveled a similar path. This is why it is often difficult for an adolescent or adult to find a counselor or psychotherapist who understands multilevel inner growth (Level III). Being surrounded by people who accepted the atrocities of Vietnam brought doubt to Lieutenant Font in his searching process: "I was wavering. Am I a conscientious objector? Am I not? What is my duty to my country? What does it mean that I am a military officer? Am I other things

first before I am a military officer, such as a U.S. citizen, such as a human being?"

Such questions asked of oneself make one aware of the singular individuality of every human being, because the answers must come from within the person. They have to be felt; they cannot be provided by someone else, because if they were we would be back in another mainstream version of ready-made values and conventions. There is a strong and logical connection between the process of personal growth and the realization that others truly are individuals, because there is nothing more individual than the development of a single organism. The set of genes is unique. When it is not we have clones, and clones, being exact copies, have no individuality.

One fundamental process of inner growth is standing back and examining one's inner self. The more one does this, the more one tries to lift the "protective veiling," the more one becomes aware of the disparity between the call of the ideal and the way one is. The ideal is what makes one begin to feel more and more deeply what one ought to be. This process of self-examination and self-judgment Dabrowski called "subject-object in oneself," a term he borrowed from Kierkegaard. It results in a more empathic understanding of other people and an even stronger realization that they, too, have their own and very individual life and development to follow.

Level IV: Self-Actualization

This stance of judging and correcting oneself, but of empathy and individual understanding toward others, is, for the most part, absent in Level II. This is why the growth process in Level II is a struggle to attain one's individual sense of self, while in Level III it is a struggle to live up to one's inner ideal. In Level IV it is no longer a struggle, because one lives more closely to one's ideal self and draws strength from it. Therein lies the connection with Level V, in which the inner ideal becomes a radiant and powerful field of spiritual force.

Eleanor Roosevelt's ideal was Christ: "If we believe in Democracy and that it is based on the possibility of a Christ-like way of life, then everybody must force himself to think through

his own basic philosophy, his own willingness to live up to it and to help carry it out in everyday life" (Roosevelt, 1940, p. 76). It is worth pausing to examine this remarkable statement. She says, in effect, that there is no shortcut to true democracy but that all must examine their lives and start to implement every day and with everyone the ideal of cooperation, good will, and brotherhood that Christ set for us. Such a program has the hallmark of a level of inspiration higher than self-actualization. Few knew how closely to this ideal she actually lived: "She was a woman with a deep sense of spiritual mission. . . . Christ's story was a drama that re-enacted itself repeatedly in her thoughts and feelings. Amid the worldliness, the pomp, and the power of Washington she managed to hold vivid and intimate communion with Christ with a child's innocence and simplicity" (Lash, 1971, p. 391).

Inner transformation in this kind of inner growth is carried out by means of definite methods. One can identify several of these in the way she coped with inner conflict and the emotional pain that love often brings. One such method was quiet contemplation, another was hard work, and yet another was self-discipline (concentration, the practice of inner calm, and good organization of daily activities). She wrote that among the most difficult things to accept are those limitations in ourselves that make us unable to meet the need of someone we love, be it spouse, child, or friend. She then went on to say that our further emotional growth and maturity depend on this choice: that either we learn to meet that need or we allow someone else to meet it, "without bitterness or envy" (Roosevelt, 1960, p. 67). If I cannot marry the person I love, I can still let him or her marry someone else, and keep on loving and keeping that deep bond alive and growing. Deep bonds do not require that people eat breakfast together every day, or that they must have a physical hold on each other.

To survive the unbearable heartbreak of her husband's unfaithfulness—an event in which her private happy world collapsed, and in which she was all alone—she discovered the power of quiet contemplation. She started making trips to a cemetery that contained a statue, a tall bronze figure with a striking ex-

pression on her face, created by Saint-Gaudens. To Eleanor Roosevelt that face expressed a peace "beyond pain and beyond joy." She later told a friend that she went there to "sit and look at that woman. And I always came away somehow feeling better. And stronger. I've been here many, many times" (Hickok, 1962, pp. 91–92). This contemplative practice was her very own psychotherapy, which later enabled her to say, "Behind tranquility lies conquered unhappiness."

With the pain of loss she coped by burying herself in work. She did this when her brother died and again when F.D.R.'s death created a void in her life: "As time went on, the fact that I kept myself occupied made my loneliness less acute. . . . My philosophy has been that if you have work to do and do it to the best of your ability you will not have so much time to think about yourself" (Roosevelt, 1958, p. 7).

Her emotional gifts and victories were supported by mature self-discipline. She trained herself to maintain inner calm and to work with concentration amidst noise and commotion. As remarkable as this seems, to her it was just common sense, and to say "I don't have enough time" was in her judgment a poor excuse for defective planning and lack of organization:

We have all the time there is. The problem is: How shall we make the best use of it? There are three ways in which I have been able to solve that problem: first, by achieving an inner calm so that I can work undisturbed by what goes on around me; second, by concentrating on the thing in hand; third, by arranging a routine pattern for my days . . . remaining flexible enough to allow for the unexpected. There is a fourth point which, perhaps, plays a considerable part in the use of my time. I try to maintain a general pattern of good health so that I have the best use of my energy whenever I need it.

I learned that the ability to attain this inner calm, regardless of outside turmoil, is a kind of inner strength. It saves an immense amount of wear and tear on the nervous system. (Roosevelt, 1960, pp. 25–26, 27)

Eleanor Roosevelt's life is an example of self-actualization (Piechowski & Tyska, 1982; see Table 21.3) and no doubt of even more

Table 21.3
Traits of Self-Actualization

| |
|---------------------------------------|
| Autonomy: |
| More efficient perception of reality |
| Acceptance |
| Quality of detachment |
| Autonomy |
| Resistance to enculturation |
| Problem-centeredness: |
| Problem centering |
| Discrimination between means and ends |
| Spontaneity: |
| Spontaneity, simplicity, naturalness |
| Continued freshness of appreciation |
| Creativeness |
| Peak experiences |
| Feeling of fellowship with others: |
| <i>Gemeinschaftsgefühl</i> |
| Democratic character structure |
| Unhostile sense of humor |
| Interpersonal relations |
| Imperfections |

than that. Maslow's composite picture of self-actualizing individuals fits exactly Dabrowski's construct of persons in Level IV, a conception of the kind of people who have developed a strong sense of universal values and whose extraordinary sense of responsibility leads them to take up tasks for the sake of others (Piechowski, 1978). Maslow (1970) pointed out that these people are strongly focused on problems outside themselves. They focus on problems rather than on the protection or enhancement of their own ego. They perceive tasks to fulfill because they respond to the need and urgency of the times.

With Level IV comes the genuine realization that each individual human being one encounters has within him or within her a store of unrealized potential. Coming upon the face of a beautiful child amidst people unshapen by heavy labor, Saint-Exupéry exclaimed, "Protected, cultivated, what could not this child become? It is the sight, a little bit in all these men, of Mozart murdered" (Smith, 1959, p. 100). This kind of vision might as well characterize Level V, a vision of every human being in its unrealized potential of immortal spirit. This level of development brings with it the

incomprehensible freedom found in total selflessness, in love truly unconditional, expecting nothing in return, love that accurately perceives the divine spark even in the most darkened soul.

Dabrowski's theory is complex. Each level, and especially levels III, IV, and V, is characterized by a number of developmental dynamisms. A few of these have been mentioned: in Level III, astonishment with oneself, positive maladjustment, dissatisfaction with oneself, subject-object in oneself; in Level IV, self-therapy (illustrated by Eleanor Roosevelt's quiet contemplation), inner psychic transformation, and personality ideal. A more detailed exposition of the theory must be sought in a number of available and unavailable sources (Brennan, 1987; Dabrowski, 1964, 1967; Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Hague, 1988; Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Miller & Silverman, 1987; Nelson, 1989; Piechowski, 1975, 1978; Weckowicz, 1988). As with any conceptually rich theory, we must remind ourselves that a mere skeletal outline will not bring forth for us the understanding that only closer study and application can give.

One conceptual bridge of the theory needs to be clarified. Dabrowski was well aware of the importance of the environment in either promoting or inhibiting a person's growth, but he did not elaborate on it. His basic idea was that developmental potential (the overexcitabilities, talents, special abilities, and intelligence) comes in different magnitudes and strengths. In a totally depriving environment even the strongest developmental potential will not succeed, just as a musical gift will not develop in a tone-deaf environment, empty of musical instruments. If the environment is partially negative, then a strong developmental potential can overcome it, although not totally. Eleanor Roosevelt's story is a good example of this. There were some positive influences—privileged social status, availability of excellent education, and her father's love for her—and some negative ones—the lack of love from her mother, the unsteadiness and unreliability of her father, the early loss of him, the severity of her grandmother who then raised her. These left her with emotional scars and a vulnerability that stayed with her to the end (Lash,

1984). Yet it is quite clear that she kept making positive and growthful choices all her life just as she set down in *You Learn by Living* (Roosevelt, 1960). It is striking how often she employs the language of personal growth. To make the point, higher levels of development depend on the presence of strong developmental potential in a favorable environment. We find this potential among the gifted. Strong developmental potential and giftedness go together. However, not every kind of giftedness is associated with a strong developmental potential.

Self-Actualization and Emotional Giftedness

The correspondence between the two constructs, Maslow's self-actualization and Dabrowski's Level IV, enabled Brennan (1987) to conduct a search for the seemingly rare highly developed individual. Using nominations and the instrument for assessing levels of development, he cast a net that caught several self-actualizing fish. Individuals assessed to be developmentally representative of Level IV were found to meet the criteria of self-actualization. They also showed evidence of giftedness in their childhood.

It is not hard to see that while the world of academic psychology accepts the notion of self-actualization as Maslow's legacy, at the same time it either doubts the existence of self-actualizing people or, worse yet, confuses self-actualization with self-absorbed individualism (e.g., Geller, 1982; Smith, 1973; for a review of this issue see Waterman, 1984). Surely part of this doubt comes from the fact that no studies of self-actualizing people have been made in the years following Maslow's untimely death. The only two case studies were of historical figures, but they were recent, and so no more than a drop in the academic bucket (Piechowski, 1978; Piechowski & Tyska, 1982). Brennan's study is of great significance. He found self-actualizing people who are not famous and who are living now, in our times. He showed that looking for self-actualizing people among the gifted is a sure way of finding them.

He studied their developmental histories and found that they all have been emotionally wounded in different ways and had to make the significant *decision for self* in order to live a life true to themselves. Did he find them to be emotionally gifted? Of the three cases, one excels in this. This is a woman, a social worker, with an unusual degree of inborn intuition and sensitivity to others. It enables her to find common ground and establish rapport with anyone. She has been praised for her facility to work with psychiatric patients. However, it has its thorns: "I am in pain because they are in pain. . . . I feel that pain so much that I'll do anything to make them feel better" (Brennan, 1987, p. 208).

From this all too brief review we can conclude that giftedness in general—in the sense of intellectual potential, breadth of interests, and emotional intensity—is a necessary condition for self-actualization. However, self-actualization is not synonymous with emotional giftedness. Perhaps this ought to be clarified a little. A person may be emotionally gifted, in the sense of caring, understanding, nurturing, forming strong attachments, empowering others, being nonjudgmental and accepting of others, yet blind to his or her own gifts, self-critical, even self-punitive. For such a person the struggle for self-acceptance is yet to be won. Self-actualizing people are self-accepting and with a sense of humor about it. They have a mission in life, and if that mission is to serve others directly out of compassion and concern for their individual dignity, as Gandhi and Eleanor Roosevelt did, then self-actualization and emotional giftedness blend into one. However, if the mission is to help humankind indirectly, through research, reform, art, poetry, music, or probing the mysteries of life and the universe, then emotional giftedness might not be as strongly manifest.

By what signs, then, can we recognize the potential for self-actualization and the potential for emotional giftedness in young people? Some signs have been mentioned: emotional overexcitability expressed in the intensity and sensitivity to feelings in others and in oneself, empathy and understanding of others, early emergence of ethical concerns about being fair to others, worrying about subtle issues in how

others are affected by one's actions, or anything that we can recognize as proper to the domain of personal intelligences.

Emotional life is difficult to observe from the outside. For this reason, clinical investigations and subjects who are willing to disclose the movement of their inner life are the only means of gaining some insight. Grant's (1988) recent study of the diverse types of moral development is an excellent example of the richness of insight into the emotional life of individuals that opens up to a skilled investigator. Comparing written responses to the items of the overexcitability questionnaire with responses obtained in a interview revealed that the protected privacy of writing led to more emotional self-disclosures than did the interview. This was found with gifted youngsters 9 to 13 years old (Piechowski, unpublished). An exploratory investigation of emotional growth has been carried out with gifted adolescents (Piechowski, 1989). Here only the principal findings are presented.

Emotional Growth of Gifted Children and Adolescents

In a 2-year follow-up study conducted in collaboration with Nicholas Colangelo, self-reports were obtained from gifted youngsters. At the beginning of the project they were 12 to 17 years old (Piechowski, Colangelo, Grant, & Walker, 1983). The purpose of the study was to find individual patterns of emotional development. The subjects were recruited from gifted programs in several high schools. The youngsters were given an open-ended questionnaire to tell what evoked in them strong positive feelings, what stimulated their minds, what was their conception of self, and the like. The items were designed to tap the five dimensions of developmental potential described at the beginning of this chapter. The results are given in more detail elsewhere (Piechowski, 1989).

This study revealed two contrasting types of development in gifted adolescents. In one type the orientation was pragmatic with definite and not too distant goals and not much inner exploration. This type of growth was called *rational-altruistic* because it closely fit

with the type of character development described by Peck and Havighurst (1960). The other type was characterized by an awareness of inner life quite unlike that of the typical self-conscious adolescent. This type was called *introspective-emotional*. It is in this type that we see the potential for emotional growth as described by Dabrowski's theory. Several characteristics emerged. They are listed in Table 21.4.

Unlike many adolescents who live for the moment, are very peer-conscious, or are worried about their future, we have found in a number of gifted children an early awareness of their personal growth and its numerous possibilities, an eager anticipation and making ready for what is to come. One girl expressed it similarly at age 12, "I dream of being an adult," and at age 14, "I dream about how my life will be when I grow up. I dream lots and lots of ways I could be."

In response to the question about what attracted his attention in books, a boy of 17 expressed an intense inner push for emotional growth: "I want to be moved, changed somehow. I seek change, metamorphosis. I want to grow (not just in relation to books, either)."

Awareness of feelings and emotions gains importance. In reply to the question about who they are, several youngsters described themselves in distinctly emotional terms:

[I am] A person who needs attention and a person that needs to be accepted. He can't be turned away because he gets hurt easily. (male, age 16)

Table 21.4
Characteristics of Emotional Growth of Introspective Gifted Adolescents

1. Awareness of growing and changing—
awareness of many possible developmental paths
2. Awareness of feelings and conscious attention to them
3. Feelings of unreality
4. Inner dialogue and self-judgment
5. Searching, questioning, asking existential questions (problem finding)
6. Awareness of one's real self

I am a very misunderstood person. . . . People think that my life is easy because I am talented, but I have a lot of problems of my own just because of these talents. I often even get cut down for something good that I do. This is very hard to cope with. I am a very sensitive and emotional person. I get angered or saddened very easily. I can also get happy easily. I think I like this part of me. All these emotions somehow make me feel good about myself. . . . I am not a very confident person, though people think I am. (male, age 16)

I am a person who has feelings. . . . I have friends. I love life NOTE: I HAVE FEELINGS. (female, age 12)

The note of insistence on feelings shows at once their frustration when their feelings were ignored by others and how important they were to these gifted children's self-definition.

Empathy and understanding of others can be quite conscious, as for the girl just quoted (at age 14): "I can see myself in other people, I can see things I've done in what other people do. I *really* understand people's thoughts and actions because I think of times I was in their place." Expressions of understanding and caring for others were frequent in the responses of these youngsters.

Although adolescence is developmentally a time when interest in one's own and others' feelings comes to focus, the articulateness and insight of these gifted youngsters was rather exceptional. The emotional maturity and sensitivity that some youngsters achieve in late adolescence appears in the gifted—those engaged in emotional growth—in early adolescence. They show the signs of emotional giftedness.

Periods of intense emotional growth can bring on such sudden inner shifts as to produce moments of disequilibrium and estrangement. One feels at odds with the surroundings, as if suddenly alien to what was familiar before. Such feelings of unreality are not necessarily a cause for concern. What calls for concern is the fact that great emotional intensity and sensitivity combined with high intelligence make a youngster acutely aware of the precariousness of human existence and the precarious condition of our world. Because of

this, and because others understand it so little, gifted children can be extremely vulnerable and at risk (Leroux, 1986; Roedell, 1984).

Feelings of unreality are the inevitable product of great emotional intensity and feeling "different," while experiencing rapid shifts in perspective. For example, "Sometimes I think I am going insane and I wish I had someone intelligent to talk to" (female, age 16). In the next excerpt the feeling of unreality is combined with emotional experimentation, thinking of the parents as strangers, which can be interpreted as a step toward individual autonomy: "When I ask myself who I am, sometimes I wonder if I'm *really* here. Or, I'll look at mom and dad and ask myself, who are these people, and I try to picture them as total strangers" (female, age 15).

Inner dialogue and self-judgment are an essential part of moral growth. Although in his cognitive theory of moral development Kohlberg (1981) minimized the importance of emotions, the penetrating genius of William James (1902) saw a definite and necessary link between the strength of one's emotions and moral character. If beliefs and actions are to be congruent, a person must feel the issues with passion. For James, moral questions were real only to those who felt them so strongly that they felt called by them to an active response. Therefore, one had to begin with oneself. Self-judgment, then, is an evaluation of one's own self, the arduous way toward self-knowledge. Being self-critical is common among the gifted. To some it spells the danger of developing a negative self-image. One must, however, try to distinguish in each case if the self-criticism, which can appear very negative, is a spur toward growth or an obstacle in the person's growth.

Here are some examples of how these youngsters monitored themselves. Their sensitive consciences were fitted with a spur to self-correction—the opposite of most adolescents, who, paradoxically, can be very critical of everything and everyone and yet be lacking in self-judgment (Elkind, 1984). The following inner dialogue was a response to the question, "Do you ever think about your own thinking? Describe."

When I take a stand on something, I later wonder why I did that. I think about how I came to that conclusion. I think about if I was right, according to the norms of society. I think about my friends and other people I know and wonder if I really feel the way I let on, and if I am fooling myself by thinking things I really feel. (male, age 17)

The issues of right and wrong figure prominently here; this is in itself not unusual, but the process of sorting the issues out was already strongly autonomous. The writer examined the origin of his convictions and asked himself whether they were genuine or perhaps just self-deceptions. For contrast, here is a response to the question, "In what manner do you observe and analyze others?" from another 17-year old male.

Critically. I have an unusual ability for finding people's faults and discovering their vulnerabilities. I use this knowledge, too—sometimes even unconsciously. . . .

I am a manipulator, and it sometimes bothers me. I know how to handle friends, family, teachers, etc., which makes things comfortable for me but does sometimes bother my conscience. (Fleetingly, though.)

One might be inclined to wonder whether the future development of this boy would lead him to continue to muffle his conscience and become an even more skillful puppeteer pulling the strings in others to his own advantage. In his case this did not seem likely because in answer to the question about what most attracted his attention in a book, he wrote that the characters were important and that he wanted "to be able to understand them and relate to them—to sympathize with them. I want to be moved, changed somehow." A person to whom such feelings are important is not likely to ignore them in others or the impact on others of his actions. Colangelo and Brower (1987), for example, reported that their gifted subjects worried about the reactions and feelings of their siblings who were not included in the gifted program.

Searching, inquiring, and problem finding are those special abilities (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) enabling one to dis-

cover things that need discovering, questions that need to be asked, and problems that have yet to be conceived. Questioning, self-scrutiny, and the search for truth go together. Gifted youngsters often ask basic, philosophical, and existential questions. Somehow they develop a sense not only of objective truth but of inner truth as well.

Lots of times I wish I wouldn't think so much. It makes me very confused about a lot of stuff in the world. And I always wish I could think up answers instead of just questions. . . . My parents and all my adult friends don't understand. I wish I could talk to somebody who would have the same questions I do, *and* the answers to them. Maybe instead of somebody intelligent, I need somebody insane. (female, age 16)

In Delisle's (1984) extensive collection of responses from younger children, one can find similar responses about arguing with teachers or persistently asking questions. But moral concerns and evaluations, and issues of personal responsibility, are more typical of adolescents.

I think about my morals and what I really think is right and wrong. I often find that how I feel is a contradiction of what society thinks. This makes me wonder if there is something wrong with me. I concentrate on why and how I became this way and if I will always be this way. (male, age 17)

I live day to day like everyone else but I am continually frustrated with the shallowness of how we live and relate to one another.

Sometimes I hate myself because I am lazy and I feel unable to change. (female, age 16)

We see in these concepts keen questioning and self-scrutiny. We can recognize the Dabrowskian dynamisms of astonishment (first excerpt), dissatisfaction with oneself (second excerpt), and positive maladjustment (both excerpts). These youngsters are gifted not only in terms of their talents and abilities but in terms of character growth—they sincerely want to become better persons. Their self-knowledge is impressive for this age. It shows emotional giftedness in the making. It fits

Gardner's (1983) concept of intrapersonal intelligence.

Awareness of one's real self appears early in those engaged in intense emotional growth. Gifted youngsters quickly realize that their self-knowledge, the way they know and understand themselves, differs from the way others see and know them. They thus realize that their real self is hidden from others, and they can even be aware of keeping it that way.

I'm somebody no one else knows. Some people see one part of me, others see other parts, it's like I'm acting. The real me is the one inside me. My real feelings, that I understand but can't explain. (female, age 14)

The development of self-awareness and self-understanding of these gifted youngsters traces the general direction described for adolescents by Broughton (1980), Selman (1980), and others. What is distinctive in the gifted is an acceleration of development and a greater intensity of existential questioning. And, importantly, they value their emotional side. It is not just awareness of having moods, feelings, and emotions but the realization that these are a distinct and essential part of one's self and for this the emotions are to be cherished.

Conclusions

The outstanding feature of the emotional development of the gifted is their emotional sensitivity and intensity. Sometimes it is hidden; sometimes it is prominent. In an exploratory study of emotional growth of gifted adolescents, we found that only a small number followed a type of growth oriented more toward outward achievement and recognition than toward introspection and emotional awareness. The introspective type of emotional growth was rather free of the self-consciousness and egocentrism characteristic of early adolescence. Instead it displayed an awareness of one's real self, an understanding of feelings and emotions, an empathic approach to others, and much focus on inner growth through

searching, questioning, carrying on an inner dialogue, and exercising self-corrective judgment. We associate these characteristics with emotional giftedness because it is in self-scrutiny and self-judgment that we find ourselves wanting; this leads us to develop a more accepting and compassionate understanding of others. Out of emotional sensitivity grows the desire to be of help to others, and the ideal of service is its fulfillment.

These features of emotional development of the gifted are built into Dabrowski's theory, which was developed on the basis of extensive clinical experience with gifted and talented youngsters and adults. The type of growth in which moral issues, concern for others, and probing existential questions arise with a degree of intensity that troubles an adult's or a youngster's mind because it is so different from the usual interests and preoccupations of one's peer group is described in detail by Dabrowski and placed in a large framework of levels of development. This framework makes sense to gifted people and gives them comfort. The comfort comes from realizing that the inner turmoil, the overwhelming feeling of being pushed to the wall, and the despair are part of the difficult process of changing and growing; it also comes from realizing that experiencing intensely the issues of right and wrong; or the emotional questions of rights, possessiveness, and freedom that arise in intimate relationships; or the struggles to free oneself from the negative messages and influences of one's past is inevitable in the striving for wholeness, balance, and inner harmony that is nourished by deeply felt ideals. Such struggles pave the way for self-actualization. By a peculiar coincidence, the construct of self-actualization fits into Dabrowski's theory so well that one could say that Maslow described what self-actualizing people are like and how they act, while Dabrowski mapped out the more abstract inner dynamics of their psychology.

Research quoted in the body of the chapter and clinical examples show that emotional giftedness and self-actualization can be recognized and distinguished, for they are not one and the same. Our present state of understanding is that all self-actualizing people so far

studied in detail are gifted. On the other hand, not all emotionally gifted people are self-actualizing, because the kind of empathy and willingness to help and be of service that some people readily extend toward others they deny themselves. Lack of self-acceptance often combined with some self-defeating behaviors is an obstacle toward self-actualization. Yet this is not an obstacle toward compassion and caring. After all, giving others what one needs for oneself is a more constructive solution, and a more ennobling one, to one's existential crisis than anger, greed, or excessive self-indulgence.

Not all self-actualizing people appear to be emotionally gifted. But in some outstanding individuals the two qualities combine, as illustrated in the lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Eleanor Roosevelt as well as in cases of people now living who have been studied with proper tools. These examples and these studies are only a beginning of the effort needed to gain a more thorough knowledge of emotional giftedness and self-actualization. And let us not overlook the fact that self-actualization is a much distorted and misinterpreted term and we must restore its original meaning. We will never know what self-actualization really means if we rely on paper-and-pencil measures. It can be truly understood and known only through the lives of self-actualizing people.

Dabrowski's concept of developmental potential provides the means toward identifying potential for higher levels of development. The higher levels in his developmental hierarchy describe types of emotional development that we encounter in the gifted, and with the aid of his theory we can make better sense of it for them and for ourselves. What Dabrowski develops particularly well is the fight for one's principles that precedes self-actualization. Attempts to live by high ideals, to be true to oneself, meet with social opposition that is hard to escape. The character of Nekhludov in Tolstoy's *Resurrection* illustrates the process of becoming true to oneself. The case of Lieutenant Louis Paul Font turned conscientious objector illustrates in our times the sacrifice that it may demand. This drama is repeated in the lives of gifted children everywhere.

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