

Millon's Evolutionary Polarities: Allowing for Lateral Reversals with the Narcissistic Personality as an Example

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Abstract

In this paper we propose that Theodore Millon's Evolutionary Polarities and their "Reversal between polarities" should be expanded to include lateral reversals, that is, reversals between polarities that are not horizontally opposite to each other. We present the Narcissistic personality as a case, and propose that the Narcissistic prototype be revised to include a lateral reversal between the Self-Individuation and the Active-Modification polarities.

Millon's Evolutionary Polarities: Allowing for Lateral Reversals with the Narcissistic Personality as an Example

One of the more compelling features of Theodore Millon's personality theory is the system of evolutionary polarities that as integrated into Millon's general conception of psychopathology (Millon 1990, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). While these ideas date back to the tradition of Spencer (1870), Huxley (1870) as well as that of Wilson (1975, 1978), the Evolution-Based Personality Theory as it appears in the work of Millon is perhaps the first such system that is both immediately tangible, while being able to provide an abstract conceptualization at the same time.

In Millon et al.'s portraiture of several of their personality prototypes, the evolutionary polarities featured in their system contain so-called *reversals between polarities*. Two immediately striking examples of such reversals are the Sadistic and Masochistic prototypes. Each of these types are depicted in Millon's system as suffering a reversal

on the Pain-Pleasure polarity, which is the first evolutionary axis of Millon's model.¹ Another example of a personality prototype that features polarity reversals is the Schizotypal personality, which, owing to its "chaotic object representations" (Millon 2007b), experiences a reversal between polarities on all three polarity-pairs.²

Thus, the phenomenon of prototypes being afflicted with "reversals between polarities" can be said to be a stable and recurring feature of Millon's system of evolutionary polarities. However, until now, the only reversals featured in Millon's system thus far have been "horizontal" reversals, that is to say, reversals between polarities that are horizontally opposite to one another (i.e. Pain-Pleasure, Active-Passive, Self-Other). In the present paper we explore the potential benefits of introducing lateral reversals into Millon's model, that is, polarities that are not directly opposite to each other.

The Narcissistic Prototype as an Example

In Millon's discussion of the Narcissistic personality (Millon 1990), Millon acknowledges a debt to the Kernbergian notion that with regards to the narcissistic prototype, that personality style has at heart a borderline inclination, that is, the narcissist is subject to the same shifting moods and volatile propensities that is so readily apparent in the interpersonal conduct of the borderline proper (Kernberg 1975, 1987).³ Where the narcissist prototype and the borderline prototype differ, however, is that whereas the Borderline prototype is relatively defenseless, malleable and "expressively spasmodic" (Millon 2007a), the narcissist has at some point in his development fostered an outer shell of certitude, to compensate for his volatile interior, (what Millon calls his "spurious morphological organization").

¹ Millon & Grossman: Overcoming Resistant Personality Disorders p. 203 cf. Millon & Grossman: Moderating Severe Personality Disorders p. 161

² Millon & Grossman: Moderating Severe Personality Disorders p. 197, 198

³ Millon, Grossman, Millon, Meagher, & Ramnath: Personality Disorders in Modern Life p. 347

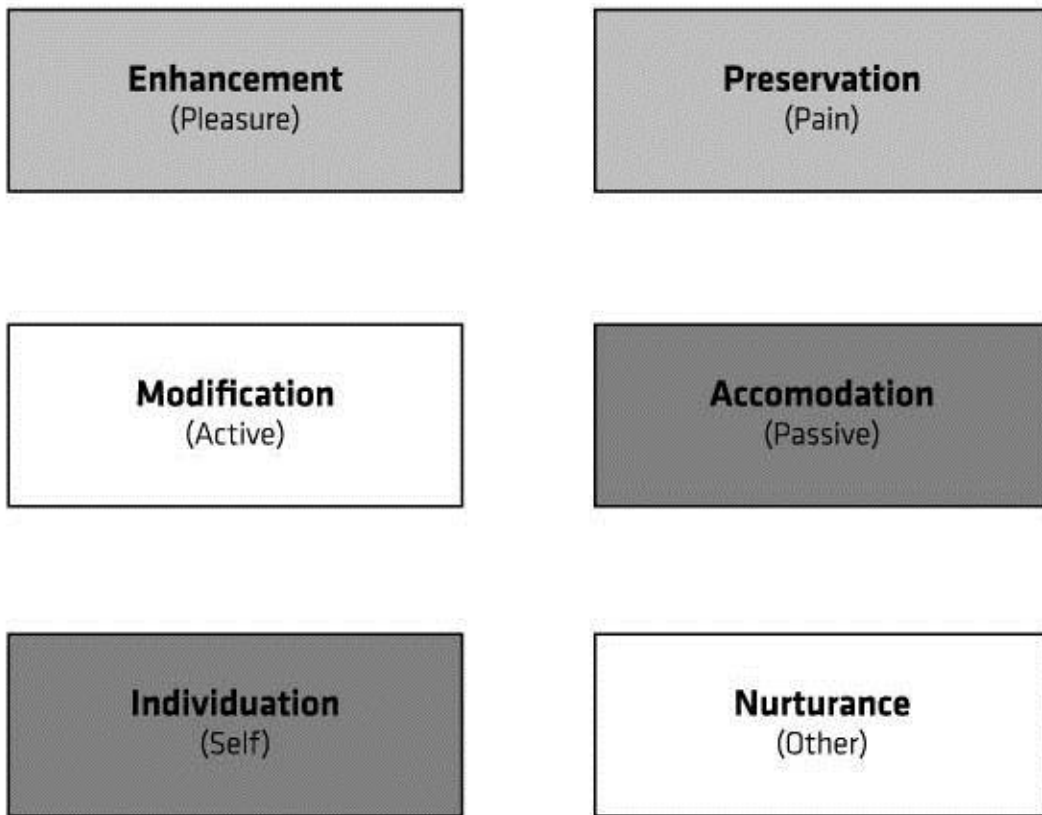
In keeping with this notion of Kernberg's, we propose that an aspect of narcissistic behavior where the borderline aspect of the personality is especially apparent is with regards to the phenomenon known as the *narcissistic temper*, that is, when the narcissist has attached himself to the specific outcome of a given activity, discussion, or conflict. Not infrequently, the narcissist will employ the defenses of *rationalization*, *splitting* and *compensatory certitude* in the process of achieving their desired outcome, giving off the impression of an especially strong commitment to the given outcome. Yet to the wonder and amazement of their friends and co-workers, and to the noted interest of their therapists, once the outcome is achieved all this fervor and zeal is quick to fade as it gives way to indifference.




We suggest that both instances of the narcissistic temper; the initial, strong-minded certitude *and* the subsequent indifference, are aspects of narcissistic behavior (indifference being well in line with Millon's verdict that the Narcissistic prototype is *strong on passive polarity*), yet it is only when these instances are examined jointly that the narcissist reveals himself to be steered by the shifting passions of the borderline personality: For they reveal a capricious quality that is otherwise easily concealed by the narcissist's propensity for rationalization, *rationalization regulatory mechanism* (Millon 2007b).

The interesting thing, with relations to Millon's evolutionary polarities is, that during these moods, the narcissist's commitment to the realization of his or her desired outcome can be said to be situated as an *ecological attitude* and thus to constitute a disturbance between the faculties of *self* and *active*.

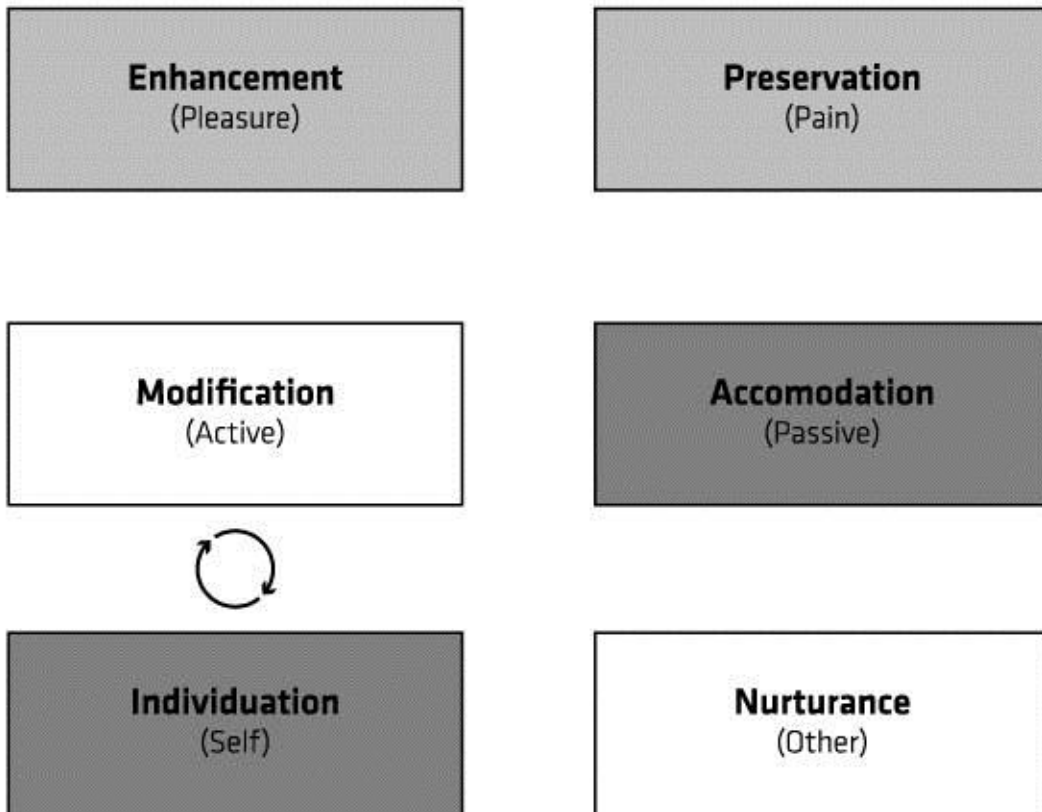
Thus, on the basis of the preceding observations we are now in a position to contribute a new perspective to Millon's otherwise excellent model of the Narcissistic prototype's evolutionary polarities:





NARCISSISTIC PROTOTYPE, ACCORDING TO MILLON 2007B



-
-  Weak on Polarity Dimension
 -  Average on Polarity Dimension
 -  Strong on Polarity Dimension

NARCISSISTIC PROTOTYPE, REVISED FOR LATERAL REVERSALS



-
-  Reversal between Polarities
 -  Weak on Polarity Dimension
 -  Average on Polarity Dimension
 -  Strong on Polarity Dimension

References

Millon & Grossman: **Moderating Severe Personality Disorders** (Wiley 2007)

Millon, Grossman et al.: **Personality Disorders in Modern Life** (Wiley 2004)

Millon & Grossman: **Overcoming Resistant Personality Disorders** (Wiley 2007)