

FROM OUR ARCHIVES

Did you know that Eric Berne, the originator of Transactional Analysis, himself contributed an article in the very first volume of Indian Journal of psychiatry ?

This article which appeared in IJP vol.1.1959, is being republished here because of its historical interest - Editor

PRINCIPLES OF TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

ERIC BERNE

Summary

Transactional analysis is part of a comprehensive system of individual and social psychiatry. It offers an indigenous approach to group therapy by making maximum therapeutic use of the transactions which continually take place between those present. These transactions are analyzed into extero-psychoic, neo-psychoic and archaopsychic components, called colloquially Parent, Adult and Child, respectively. These components manifest themselves as complete ego states which reproduce the ego states of parental figures or are autonomous, or are revivals of fixated archaic ego states from childhood.

Patients are instructed in the principles of structural and transactional analysis through the use of the clinical material in the group proceedings. They can then proceed to the more advanced phases of game analysis and script analysis with the therapeutic goal of attaining social control. They are then able to conduct their relationships with others in an autonomous way at their own options, and are no longer victims of unconscious, uncontrolled compulsions to exploit or be exploited.

Transactional analysis is part of a comprehensive system of individual and social psychiatry. It is designed to make maximum therapeutic use of the actual occurrences in therapy groups, which consist of transactions between patients on the one hand, and transactions between the patients and the therapist on the other. It has been tested by well-prepared therapists in private practice and in a variety of hospital and agency settings, on groups of neurotics, psychotics, mental defectives, sexual psychopaths, professional workers, married couples, and mothers of disturbed children.

The system is based on the observation that psychic functioning and social behavior are related to states of mind which may be called ego states. An ego state may be described phenomenologically as a coherent system of feelings, and operationally as a set of coherent behaviour patterns; or pragmatically, as a system of feelings which motivates a related set of behaviour patterns. It can be further observed that there

are three types of ego stages, each derived from a psychic organ : extero-psychoic, neo-psychoic, and archaopsychic. The anatomy and physiology of these organs is a neurological problem. Their function is manifested by the experiments of Penfield and his associates (1954) in electrical stimulation of the exposed cerebral cortex. In particular, the phenomena which occurred on stimulation of certain areas of the temporal lobes were the revival not of isolated memories, but of complete ego states of former epochs. The psychological characteristics of ego states were studied by Federn (1952) and his pupil, E. Weiss (1950).

Colloquially, extero-psychoic ego states are called collectively the Parent. These are replicas of the physiological and emotional attitudes and social behaviour of parental figures. Neo-psychoic ego states are called collectively Adult. These are manifested by objective data processing and an alertness of the outside world of reality, including the psychological reality of other people.

Archaeopsychic ego states are collectively called the Child. These are revivals of fixated ego states from earliest years. Thus the personality structure of any individual can be represented by a structural diagram as in Figure A. It should be noted that Parent, Adult, and Child are not concepts, like Superego, Ego and Id, but phenomenological and social realities.

Each is a complete ego state, including elements of Superego, Ego and Id in its own structure. For example, Freud (1933) describes the Id as "a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement... it has no organization and no unified will." The Child, on the other hand, is an organized entity with its own systematic world view and its own unified will. Superego, Ego and Id are constructs, while Parent, Adult and Child represent real people whose names and addresses are on civil record.

The classical story which illustrates the relationship between the Adult and the Child concerns an eight-year-old boy who was vacationing at a ranch in his cowboy suit. He helped the hired man unsaddle a horse, and when they were finished, the hired man said "Thanks, cowpoke!" to which his assistant answered: "I'm not really a cowboy, I'm just a little boy." The patient who told this story remarked: "That's just the way I feel. I'm not really a lawyer, I'm just a little boy." On the couch he was in truth a little boy, but in the courtroom he was an effective, case-winning grown-up.

A well-educated group soon noticed that Matthew, a new member, exhibited three characteristic ego states at the meetings. When he was discussing his wife, he spoke in loud, deep, dogmatic tones, leaning back in his chair with a stern gaze and counting off the accusations against her on his upraised fingers. At other times, he talked with another patient about carpentry problems in a matter of fact tone, leaning forward in a companionable way. On still other occasions, he taunted the other group members with a scornful smile about their apparent loyalty to the therapist, his head slightly bowed and his back ostentatiously turned towards the leader. The other patients

correctly diagnosed these three ego states as Parent, Adult, and Child respectively, and began to look for appropriate clues concerning Matthew's actual parents and childhood experiences. Soon Matthew was able to accept the diagram shown in Figure A as a useful representation of his personality structure.

This structural analysis was validated when the therapist had occasion to interview Matthew's paranoid father. The old man spoke in loud, deep dogmatic tones, leaning back in his chair with a stern gaze and counting off on his upraised fingers his accusations against the people around him. Thus Matthew's Parent exactly reproduced his father's fixated paranoid ego state. There is not time to explain the therapeutic value of making Matthew aware of these three aspects of his personality.

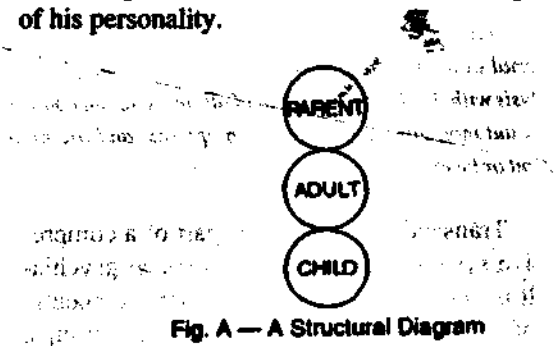


Fig. A — A Structural Diagram

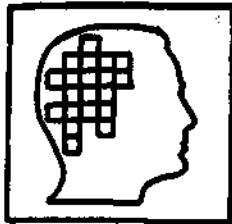
After patients (or therapists) become somewhat adept at diagnosing between extero-psychic, neopsychic, and archaeopsychic ego states, they may proceed to simple transactional analysis. The problem here is to distinguish direct transactions from complex transaction. The latter are of two kinds: crossed and ulterior.

Two types of direct transactions are illustrated by the following dialogues.

1. A: "This wall isn't perpendicular."

B: "Okay, let's find out what's wrong."

As illustrated in Figure 1, both the transactional stimulus and the transactional response in this example are Adult to Adult, and oriented toward the objective world of reality. The vectors are complementary, and there is no crossing.



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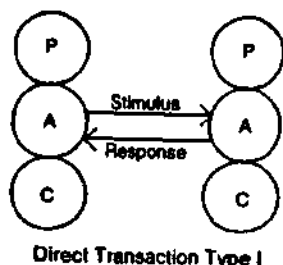


Fig.1

2. A : "Never be content with poor workmanship, son. It's immoral.

B : "Yes, sir"

As illustrated in figure 2, the transactional stimulus here is Parent to Child (in terms of ego states and not of actual relationship), while the transactional response is Child to Parent. Again the vectors are complementary, signifying a well-structured relationship.

The following dialogue illustrates the most common form of crossed transaction :

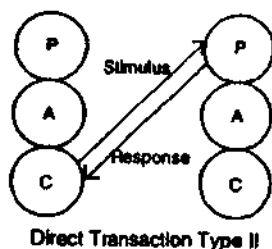


Fig.2

3. a : "The plumb bob says this wall isn't perpendicular. Let's find out what's wrong with it."

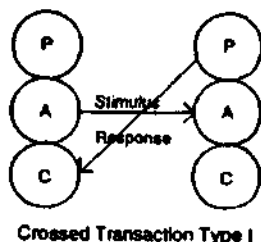


Fig.3

B : "You're always criticizing me. I'm quitting.

As shown in Figure 3, the transactional stimulus here is Adult to Adult, concerned with the objective reality of the plumb bob, while the transactional response is Child to Parent, showing an archaic disregard of the reality problem with a reaction of childlike sulkiness, so that the vectors are crossed. This particular type of crossed transaction, in which the stimulus is Adult to Adult and the response is Child to Parent, is probably the most frequent cause of misunderstanding in marriage and work situations, as well as in social life. Clinically, it is typified by the classical transference reaction, which is a special case of the crossed transaction. In fact this particular species of crossed transaction may be said to be the chief problems of psychoanalytic technique. Since psychoanalysis aims specifically at eliciting this type of crossed transaction, while transactional analysis deals with all possible types, it may be seen that transactional analysis is more general than psychoanalysis. Hence attempts to fit the former into the latter will only give rise to skepticism, difficulties and unfair criticism on both sides, just as will any attempt to fit the general into the particular. On the other hand, psychoanalysis fits quite smoothly and snugly into the frame work of transactional analysis, to the mutual intellectual satisfaction of both parties.

It is evident that crossed transactions of any type are a manifestation of poorly structured relationship. Thus both the inverse and the converse of example 3. will cause difficulties. The inverse, as in example 4. is analogous to a counter transference reaction if A represents the patient.

4. A : "This wall isn't perpendicular. Let's find out what's wrong with it."

B : "There's no excuse for your sloppy workmanship. It's immoral."

Here the stimulus is Adult to Adult, and the response is Parent to Child, as in Figure 4.

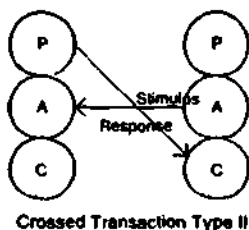


Fig.4

While this inverse is depressing, the converse is exasperating.

5. A : "Nothing goes right on this job. I'd like to tear the wall down and throw the plumb bob in the river. I'm going to leave it the way it is. Nobody cares about good workmanship nowadays anyway."

B : "The plumb bob doesn't lie."

Here the stimulus is Child to Parent, and the complementary response would be parental encouragement. The Adult response is only going to cause difficulties because in this situation it sounds supercilious rather than objective and makes a crossed transaction, as shown in Figure 5.

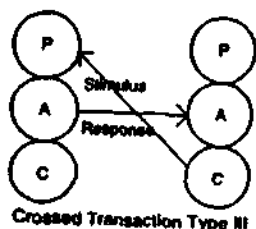


Fig.5

Ulterior transactions are those which take place at two levels simultaneously. At the superficial, social level they usually appear to be Adult to Adult, while at the deeper psychological level they involve Parent to Child.

6. A : "Come and see how perpendicular that wall is."

B : "My, you're a clever man to build that. It's really perpendicular, isn't it?"

A : "Come and see the side away from the house. That's perpendicular too."

B : "This reminds me of how the boys

used to show us the barn when I was a little girl."

A : "We used to do that too."

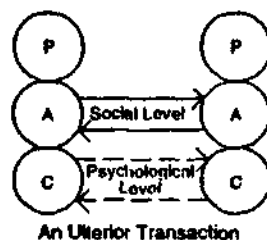


Fig.6

The analysis of this ulterior transaction is shown in Figure 6. Ostensibly, this is an Adult conversation about walls and barns, but the underlying child-like sexual play is rather obvious.

Ulterior transactions are usually part of a game, and the study of such transactions is part of game analysis. In the writer's experience, "Why don't you... Yes, but" is the commonest of all games which can be observed when people get together, whether in social gatherings, organization meetings, or therapy groups. This is a game which can be played by any number. One player who is "it", makes the first move by presenting a problem. The others respond by offering solutions each beginning with "Why don't you..." To each of these the one who is "it" presents an objection beginning with "Yes, but." A good player can stand off the rest of the group for a long time, until they all give up, where upon "it" wins (Figure 7).

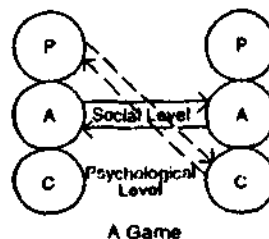


Fig.7

Game analysis is directly related to the attainment of social control, whose essential feature is option. After a game has been analyzed, the players are in a much better position to keep their Adults in control and play or not play that

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particular game as they see fit, so that they are no longer compelled by the needs of the Child or the Parent to start it or to go along with it.

Since the frustration of a game leads to a more or less serious state which is called in transactional analysis, "despair". Patients will continue in the group if they can play their games, and tend to withdraw if they cannot. In the latter case, it is the therapist's problem if the other patients will let him, to help the new patient tolerate the frustration until the aborted game can be analyzed.

Other common games are "How am I doing", "Up roar", "Alcoholic", "PTA", "Ain't it Awful?" and "Schlemiel". Schlemiel offers a convincing, but dangerous opportunity to see what happens if a game is broken up. In this game, the one who is "it" breaks things, spills things and makes messes of various kinds, and each time says: "I am sorry." This leaves the inexperienced person in a helpless position. If a sophisticated individual says: "You may break things and spill things all you wish, but please don't say "I'm sorry!" the game is broken up and the underlying hostility of the schlemiel is likely to come strongly to the fore. In fact, breaking up this game is a good way to make an enemy. Perhaps at this point many of you are thinking of Stephen Potter, but the games described here are more serious; and some of them like "Alcoholic", with all its complex rules published by various rescue organizations, are played for keeps.

"Alcoholic" is complicated because in its full form it requires four players : a persecutor, a rescuer, a dummy or patsy, and the one who is "it". The fact that people who play a certain game can potentially play any of the roles in that game explains the success of Alcoholics Anonymous. This organization cures individuals of drinking, but does not cure them of playing the game of "Alcoholic". What happens is that the member switches to the role of rescuer in this particular game, instead of playing the one who is "it". It is known that if there arises a scarcity of individuals to rescue, those who have been "cured" are likely to relapse, which in the language of game analysis

means that they switch back to their original roles of "it" in the alcoholic game.

Games are usually segments of larger, more complex sets of transactions called scripts. A script is an attempt to repeat in derivative form not a transference drama, often split up into acts, exactly like the theatrical scripts which are intuitive artistic derivatives of these primal dramas of childhood. Operationally a script is a complex set of transaction, by nature recurrent, but not necessarily recurring, since a complete performance may require a whole lifetime. A common tragic script is that based on the rescue fantasy of a woman who marries one alcoholic after another. The disruption of such a script leads to despair. Since the magical cure of the alcoholic husband which the script calls for is not forthcoming, a divorce results and the woman tries again. A practical and constructive script on the other hand, may lead to great happiness if the others in the cast are well chosen and play their parts satisfactorily. There is no time here to go into the technique of script analysis.

Relationship analysis is a technique which is most often indicated in pre-marital situations. It will be noted from Figure 8 that there are nine possible vectors in any relationship. In a particular relationship some of these are inactive and some are active, and the active ones may have varying degrees of cogency. Active vectors may also be either conjunctive or disjunctive. Analysis of these vectors gives a rather clear picture of the dynamic potentialities of any relationship between two people, and implements both prediction and postdiction with gratifying precision.

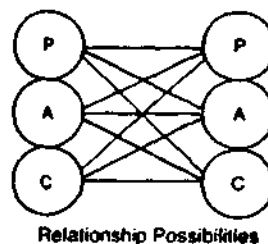


Fig. 8

Experience in using and teaching this system indicates that three factors need to be stressed for the benefit of patients and students alike.

1. It is necessary to discard conceptual thinking and to experience instead by introspection the phenomenological reality of Parent, Adult and Child, and to validate what is experienced by genetic confirmation in the actual early life of the individual.

2. The fashionable terms "childish" and "mature" are forbidden in transactional analysis because of their unfortunate semantic connotations. The Child is not to be regarded as "childish" in the derogatory sense, but childlike, with with any socially valuable attributes, potentially capable of contributing to the personality. Every grown-up has a well-formed Adult personality which is potentially capable of adequate neopsychic functioning if only it can be properly cathected.

3. It may take some time to discover that games are not occasional occurrences, but take up the large bulk of time and effort spent in

society. When it is noted that a patient plays a certain game, it will eventually be seen that this does not mean an occasional sally, once a week or once a month, but that the patient plays that game almost incessantly, hour by hour, day by day.

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