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Transactional Analysis and Pastoral Care

Within recent years there has been a burgeoning of therapeutic systems most of which have brought fresh insight and deeper perception to those men of faith who have been prepared to learn from them. All of them have enriched our general understanding of man in his world. Freudian therapy, for example, has stressed man's dynamic nature and has drawn attention to the radical nature of his sexuality. Rogerian therapy, on the other hand, has declared the principle of self-actualisation, noted the importance of the relation between helper and client, and underlined the necessity of a non-directive stance on the part of the former. 'He must adopt a non-directive attitude towards him. Even more: not only must he renounce telling him what he ought to do and when he ought to do it, but he must also give up thinking it, imagining it, and considering himself capable of forming a judgement about it.'¹ These words of Dr Paul Tournier could have been written by a good Rogerian. From the same source, not a few of those engaged in Christian ministry have gained a fresh appreciation of the meaning of acceptance and of the importance of listening.

In the present article an attempt will be made to indicate, in a preliminary way, some of the emphases to be found in Transactional Analysis and to suggest their importance for those engaged in pastoral care.

Transactional Analysis (TA in future references) was, as is widely known, originated by Dr Eric Berne, a San Francisco psychiatrist and author of the popular paperback *Games People Play*. It is a new way of describing behaviour by means of a colloquial vocabulary. It is a tool which people can be taught to use in order to gain a better understanding of their own behaviour and that of others.

It begins with the transaction as the basic observable unit of behaviour.

If we say that a transaction is anything which a person says or does in respect of another, together with the response to the stimulus so provided, we may then ask what aspect or component of the personality programmed any particular transaction. In TA three such components (ego states) are recognised – the Parent, the Adult, and the Child. These ego states are coherent patterns of attitude, feeling, and behaviour. The first resembles a parent figure and represents life as it was taught and observed; it includes a body of data, stored and recorded in the brain, which came from observing parental behaviour in the early years of life. The Child exhibits those archaic modes of response characteristic of a child; it includes that body of data, stored and

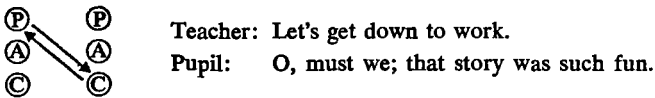
1. Paul Tournier, *A Place for You* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 151.

recorded in the brain, which came from the felt experience of the child in relation to what he saw and heard. The Adult is concerned with objective reality, with life as it is and may be. It processes new data, updates the data coming from the Parent and the Child, and makes decisions on the basis of what is true to-day.

Berne himself has put it like this:

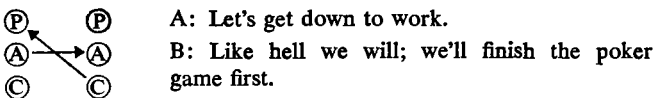
A Parental ego state is a set of feelings, attitudes and behaviour patterns that resemble those of a parent figure. The diagnosis is usually made first by observation of demeanour, gestures, voice, vocabulary and other characteristics ... The Parent usually shows in one of two forms: prejudiced or nurturing. The prejudiced Parent has a dogmatic and disapproving attitude ... The nurturing Parent is often shown in 'supporting' and sympathising with another individual ... The Adult ego state is an independent set of feelings, attitudes and behaviour patterns that are adapted to current reality and are not affected by Parental prejudices or archaic attitudes left over from childhood ... The Adult is the ego state which makes survival possible. The Child ego state is a set of feelings, attitudes and behaviour patterns that are relics of the individual's own childhood ... The Child comes out in one of two forms: adapted or natural. The adapted Child acts under the Parental influence and has modified its natural way of expression by compliance or avoidance. The natural Child is freer, more impulsive and self-indulgent.²

Transactions, then, may be programmed by one or other of these three components of the personality. As for the transactions themselves, they may be *complementary* or *crossed*, *simple* or *ulterior*. The vectors in the diagram of simple complementary transactions are parallel.



'The first rule of communication is that communication will proceed smoothly as long as transactions are complementary, and its corollary is that as long as transactions are complementary, communication can, in principle, proceed indefinitely.'³

The vectors in the diagram of crossed transactions intersect.

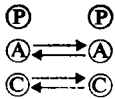


Here the stimulus is Adult-Adult: the tea break is over and the leader says, 'Back to work.' The appropriate Adult-Adult response would be: 'Maybe we should.' Instead, B's angry Child replies as if A were an overbearing Parent.

2. Eric Berne, *The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966), pp. 136-7.
3. Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), pp. 29-30.

'The converse rule is that communication is broken off when a *crossed transaction* occurs.'⁴

Uterior transactions are those which involve the activity of more than two ego states simultaneously. *Angular* transactions involve three ego states; *duplex* transactions involve four.



He: Let's get down to work.

She: Why don't we hold hands while we do.

At the social level this is an Adult conversation about a job to be done; at the psychological level it is a Child conversation about sex play. This duplex transaction contains elements which are conscious and those which are beyond conscious awareness (ulterior).

Two terms which are applied to ego states may be briefly explained at this point. An ego state, say the Adult, can be *contaminated* by another, say the Parent. Any common prejudice illustrates this. Thus, to hold that 'Englishmen are always making understatements' and to apply this principle unthinkingly to a particular Englishman, represents a contamination of the Adult by the Parent. A common generalization, 'The English understate things,' is exalted into a Parental absolute and no attempt is made to verify the truth of this absolute in respect of a particular Englishman.

The psychopath illustrates the principle of *exclusion*. He is a person who appears to be without any conscience at all. He can lie, steal, cheat, and otherwise 'use' people provided his immediate impulse is gratified; he can then take pleasure in the fact that 'people are such suckers.' In the language of this system such a person is driven by his Child while his Adult programmes the means of gratification. His Parent is excluded.

Readers of *Games People Play* will recall the wry humour of Berne's colloquialism, particularly in his thesaurus of games - Now I've Got You, You Son of a Bitch, Ain't it Awful, If it Weren't for You - and the rest. It should be added, however, that there is nothing funny about games.

A more recent exposition of TA by Dr Thomas A. Harris, founder and president of the Institute for Transactional Analysis, Sacramento, California, adopts the same colloquial approach in the title of his book, *I'm OK - You're OK*.⁵ In this work Dr Harris has drawn attention to another important feature of this system, the four life positions.

Very early in life every child concludes, 'I'M NOT OK.' He makes a conclusion about his parents, also: 'YOU'RE OK.' This is the first thing he figures out in his life-long attempt to make sense of himself and the world in which he lives. This position, I'M NOT OK - YOU'RE OK ... is permanently recorded and will influence everything he does. Because it is a decision it can be changed by a new decision. But not until it is understood.⁶

4. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

5. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

6. *I'm OK - You're OK*, p. 37.

Such a life position, or central emotional stance, becomes established within the first two years of life and it is the inevitable accompaniment of the infant's entire dependence on others for his nurture. Birth introduces him to rapid changes of body temperature, to sudden, unexpected pressures, to strange noises, to new activities, and to a situation of separateness from which he needs to be rescued by the warm support and comfort of his mother (stroking).

He is, however, continually recording the feelings which grow from the relationship between himself and others, primarily mother, and these feelings are directly related to stroking and non-stroking. Whoever provides stroking is OK. His estimate of himself is unsure because his OK feelings are transitory and continually being replaced by NOT OK feelings. Finally the uncertainty convinces him I'M NOT OK.⁷

This first life position I'M NOT OK, YOU'RE OK is universal in early childhood, it being the infant's conclusion from his situation in life. How then must life be lived? This is the question to which the *life script* is an answer; a 'decision' has to be made about this. When script analysis occurs later on, an attempt is made to uncover this early 'decision' about the way life should be lived.

A common 'decision' is in favour of withdrawal. The pain of feeling NOT OK in the presence of those who are may be so great that the person may construct a life of withdrawal in order not to feel it. Such withdrawal will underlie the life of which it is said, 'He seems so cold; he hardly has any feeling at all; you can't get near to him.' It will also underlie the attitude of shyness in the behaviour of the academic person who finds security in ideas and research but has little capacity for warming to people. Such a person is sometimes called schizoid because of the withdrawn, introverted nature he exhibits. 'Another person's script may call for behaviour which is provoking ... He may kick and spit and claw his way through life and thus achieve ... at least one constant he can count on: I'M NOT OK - YOU'RE OK.'⁸

Yet another 'decision' may be to become compliant towards the demands of those who have a big Parent (authority figures) and to achieve that which earns their praise. In this way, the person may be sure of getting big strokes; but his basic position remains the same - 'Despite everything, I'M STILL NOT OK.'

If, when a child has become mobile and is beginning to talk he meets sharp rebuffs and continued punishments and threats, he may conclude I'M NOT OK - YOU'RE NOT OK. This is the second life position. For this person life becomes a hopeless affair. Genuine strokes are refused and he may well end up by beating himself and his world.

A third or criminal life position is adopted when a child is thoroughly brutalised. He may get battered so much that when he is alone he begins to feel the only relief he knows.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

It is as if he senses, I'll be all right if you leave me alone. I'M OK by myself. As the brutal parents reappear, he may shrink in horror that it will happen again. You hurt me! You are not OK. I'M OK – YOU'RE NOT OK. The early history of many criminal psychopaths, who occupy this position, reveals this kind of gross physical abuse.⁹

The three life positions just mentioned can, however, be changed into a fourth. The childhood predicament underlying them can be exposed and it may then be seen how they are perpetuated in current behaviour. TA has found that such exposure occurs more readily in group interaction and for this reason it favours group therapy rather than individual treatment, though the latter may supplement the former.

The goal of treatment in this system is to emancipate the Adult from contamination by both Parent and Child and from the influence of unexamined data which come from these components. It aims at freeing the person to identify which component of his personality is responsible for a particular piece of behaviour, to update the data coming from his Parent and Child and to put this material at the disposal of his Adult so that he can function freely and responsibly in terms of current demands and present reality. When this occurs the fourth life position is in being – I'M OK – YOU'RE OK. The person accepts himself for what he has been, is and may become and accepts others in the same way. He and they are people of infinite worth, made for freedom, creativity, and love. Only in this position can the requirement be met, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Mt. 22:39, NEB).

The fourth life position presupposes a high degree of personal growth but this does not obliterate the NOT OK recordings in the person's Child. Reverberations of the I'M NOT OK – YOU'RE OK position may still be heard, though in another, quieter key.

Relief from the burden of the NOT OK feeling (I'm small, helpless, alone, and get it all wrong) may be sought in the playing of games.

Games provide a way of structuring time and are noteworthy for the ulterior element (concealed motivation) in them and for the payoff (secondary gain) to which they lead. 'A game is an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome.'¹⁰ There is a compulsive element, too, in the play. Given a certain life position and a particular life script, a person *has* to play certain games. He cannot say, 'Go to, I shall play Ain't it Awful'; he just plays it.

The playing of games achieves some strokes (though they may be negative ones) and the payoff. At the same time it provides a means of expression for the underlying script. Games are excerpts from the script. If we say that for most people the basic position is I'M NOT OK – YOU'RE OK, then games will express that position and hide the pain belonging to it. The game Why Don't You, Yes But illustrates this point.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

10. *Games People Play*, p. 48.

Consider the following series of transactions:

- A: My wife always leaves the garage door open.
 B: Why don't you speak to her about it?
 A: I've done that, but she takes no notice.
 B: Then why don't you lock the door and hide the key?
 A: That sounds easy enough; but she has a second key.
 B: All right. Why don't you pin a note on the door, 'Keep closed at all times'?
 A: Didn't you know that we keep the rubbish tins in the garage and that the door has to be open when the rubbish man comes?

This looks like a series of transactions at the Adult level but, in fact, A's Child is representing itself as inadequate to meet the situation, whereas B responds like an advising Parent. It is as if B were suggesting, 'I can make you grateful for what I say;' to which A's Child replies, 'Any help you can give, I can discard.' The purpose of the game is not to get suggestions but to reject them. In this way A's NOT OK Child finds expression. At bottom he feels helpless and inadequate for the situation. He has nothing constructive to offer but at least he can knock B's Parent about. At the same time he has the satisfaction of doing nothing constructive because that is the way he is! And the painful feeling attached to being NOT OK may thus be excluded.

Here, then, an ulterior element is present as the game proceeds.

When transactions are simple and complementary and are centred round a single theme a *pastime* is in being. 'With happy or well-organized people whose capacity for enjoyment is unimpaired, a social pastime may be indulged in for its own sake and bring its own satisfactions.'¹¹ Favourite pastimes with men are General Motors (car talk), How Much (what does it cost), and Do You Know (so-and-so); women, on the other hand, are better served by Kitchen (food talk), Wardrobe (fashion talk), and Nursery (baby talk). Like games, pastimes are a way of structuring time and the need for humans to do this is as urgent as the need for initial stroking, for recognition, approval and love.

Other ways of structuring time are *withdrawal*, *rituals*, *activities*, and *intimacy*. Daydreaming, or any quiet rumination, alone or in company, are examples of *withdrawal*. In a *ritual* everyone agrees to do the same thing. 'A *ritual* is a stereotyped series of simple complementary transactions programmed by external social forces.'¹² People find this pleasant because they are enabled to feel in step with others by doing the right thing without getting close to others or committing themselves to anything. An *activity* is any creative work which shapes the material of external reality – carrying out a surgical operation, pleading a case in court, washing dishes, or making a dress. An activity is a 'common, convenient, comfortable and utilitarian method of structuring time ... by a project designed to deal with the material of external

11. Eric Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 98.

12. *Games People Play*, p. 36.

reality.¹³ Such activities are satisfying in themselves, bring a sense of achievement and a harvest of strokes if the job is well done.

Intimacy is the highest mode of structuring time. 'Intimacy means the spontaneous, game-free candidness of an aware person, the liberation of the eidetically perceptive uncorrupted Child in all its naiveté living in the here and now.'¹⁴ It is the fruit of the art of loving whereby two or more people give themselves to one another (or to others) in trustful commitment for the enjoyment of the other and for the other's ultimate good.

Such, in brief outline, are some of the basic elements of TA. It has not been possible to consider the structure and meaning of games nor to inquire into script analysis. A reading of *Games People Play* would certainly repair the first omission; as for the second, TA has yet to develop a careful study of scripts. When it does, it may be surmised that some likeness to standard psychopathology may appear.

It remains, now, to suggest one or two ways in which this system may assist the priest-pastor.

Like any other model of personality functioning, this one serves the purpose of providing the student with a means of standing away from himself with a view to seeing himself differently. As Carl Rogers indicated long ago, that is the first step in all behaviour change. You have to repent before you can enter the Kingdom! In this respect the advantage of this system is that its basic concepts and its language are easy to grasp. Indeed, I was impressed when I saw a film depicting its use in a group of retarded persons.

Most of us do not find it easy to identify and verbalize our feelings – an essential element in all self-appraisal – but TA provides a handy tool for helping us to do just that. Moreover, its language is not only intelligible but free from the loaded diagnostic words (e.g., neurotic, immature, hysterical) which are so prevalent elsewhere.

Secondly, it is useful in the kind of group situation which is so common in pastoral care. Why is it, for example in a planning group, that communication breaks down? In terms of this system, the transactions have ceased to be complementary; they have become crossed. TA provides a means of identifying this, though it will need a good deal of skill actually to undo the crossing!

Further, TA is particularly useful as an adjunct of marriage preparation as well as an invaluable instrument in the resolution of marital conflict, particularly when the group method is used. Most marriages, for example, begin with a strong Child-Child element in the interaction between the partners, man's instinctual life being closely associated with his Child. This component needs to give way to the Adult as that becomes emancipated. Moreover, marriage provides a popular arena for vigorous game playing. If games, as we noted earlier frequently express the NOT OK position, they make the ultimate form of relatedness, intimacy, impossible. They thus constitute a continual barrier

13. *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, p. 85.

14. *Games People Play*, p. 180.

against marital fulfilment. TA provides a means of identifying games and this in turn sheds light on the reasons for their play. Light dawns for a married couple, for example, when the man begins to see that his NOT OK Child is prompting his excessive sexual demands while his wife realizes that her prejudiced Parent is making for difficulties in her love-making.

The system can, however, assist the pastor at a still deeper level. It is obvious that in much institutional religion there is a constant danger of Adult involvement becoming minimal while Child acceptance of Parental dogma tends to predominate. TA can help in redressing the imbalance between the Parent-Child transactions of much traditional religion and the Adult-Natural Child of true faith. Was not *Honest to God* a thrust in the same direction? If increase of the love of God and of neighbour is one of the main aims of the Church, here is a tool to assist that purpose, for such increase can only occur as the Adult is freed for faith and commitment.

Mention of the emancipation of the Adult with a corresponding enlargement of the capacity for awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy,¹⁵ suggests that this system attributes considerable importance to the religious dimension of life. This is certainly so in Dr T. A. Harris' exposition. 'The fourth position, I'M OK - YOU'RE OK,' he writes, 'because it is a conscious and verbal decision, can include not only an infinitely greater amount of information about the individual and others, but also the incorporation of not-yet-experienced possibilities which exist in the abstractions of philosophy and religion.'¹⁶ 'It is my opinion,' he adds, 'that religious experience may be a unique combination of Child (a feeling of intimacy) and Adult (a reflection on ultimacy) with the total exclusion of the Parent ... I believe the Adult's function in the religious experience is to block out the Parent in order that the Natural Child may reawaken to its own worth and beauty as a part of God's creation.'¹⁷

In the light of that kind of remark it begins to look as if TA could be *part* of the truth that makes us free.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-80.

16. *I'm OK - You're OK*, p. 50.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-4.