

COMMON SENSE:  
THE PHILOSOPHY OF PSYCHOLOGY

MARTIN CROSS

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# What is Psychology?

## Part One

What is psychology and, more to the point perhaps, what business is it of mine as a computer programmer to be asking?

From the professional point of view I should have no reason to be interested - or at least, no more interested than average; and I could have retrained professionally when I took three years out of my career to do this kind of work, full-time. But I didn't take the opportunity then, and I am unlikely to get it again.

Of course we are all psychologists. Every time you say something like: "Son, make me a cup of tea, would you?" as opposed to: "YOU! Give me tea NOW!" or "*Please* make me a cup of tea, sunny-bunny; otherwise I'll scream and scream, and hold my breath till I turn *blue!*" then you could be said to be utilising basic psychology. (You will certainly be more likely to get your tea.) But then what is "non-basic" psychology? Indeed, given that the alternatives I've suggested would hardly even cross most adult minds, what is "psychology" *not*?

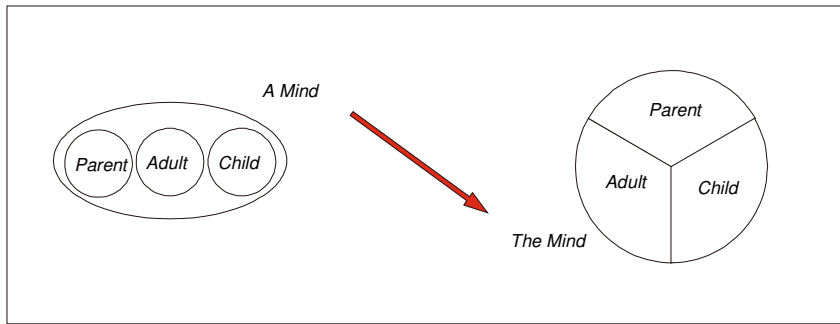
If you think this is straying into the realms of philosophy, then I think you are quite right. It is the philosophy of psychology which concerns us here and now. (I don't think it should be vice-versa). I will have to draw from my own experience . but the title here is not "What is *my* psychology?", and it is the right one. As long, that is, as the question still matters. It may be that you feel there is enough truth in the theories of Freud and Jung and in the current practise of psychoanalysis to present a satisfactory answer to most people. I would not seek to pick an argument with anyone over that, but there are also those who would think that *no* answer could ever prove adequate, and that is where I would differ. I would hope that, like me, a part of you has held out against the modern orthodoxy of 'analysis'; if only because it *is* an orthodoxy, and if only in the freedom of your own opinion. For it is that inbuilt common sense to which I am now appealing, in addressing this question to anyone, professionally or otherwise, who is averagely-interested in the subject of psychology.

So what is my answer? Simply put, it is that psychology is an understanding of the mind, based on a combination of the soul, through one's own conscience, and a unique manifestation of free will.

Nothing surprising about that I know (even from a Computer Programmer), but neither is it a fair summary of quite what I want to say; so, at the risk of wearing out my welcome straight away, let me explain just what I mean.

Many years ago, I chanced to read the famous books about Transactional Analysis. You may even have read them yourself - 'Games People Play' and 'I'm OK, You're OK'. They were worldwide bestsellers. They propose a theory based on the observation of three components to the personality, called the Parent, Adult and Child.

Of course, there are many theories about why people behave as they do: cognitive; behavioural; neurobiological; psycho-analytic. Perhaps the most famous of all is Freud's idea that there were three components to the mind which he called the id, superego and ego. To my mind however, this is *exactly the same observation as that made by Eric Berne*, which led him to create Transactional Analysis. The names are different, to reflect a simpler understanding, but the fundamental misapplication which both Freud and Berne have made is to try and see the mind as fundamentally an analytical machine, by putting the Adult at it's centre, when in fact the seat of the personality is the Parent.



This simple change of viewpoint makes it possible to see that not only is every mind composed of all three components, but also that it is composed *purely* of these three, so that at one stroke we have found a basis for the mind which is entirely distinct from either the body - or indeed, the brain.

So, is it merely then a matter of saying that everyone else is wrong and I am right? If only it were then our job now would be so much easier! I cannot say that any of the existing theories of psychology - behavioural, neurobiological, cognitive, transactional analysis, etc. - is *wrong*. Indeed, I understand it is generally recognised that they are all appropriate in their own spheres of expertise. Rather what they are is specialisations of a general theory, but it is the first such general theory that I am proposing to set out. As I see it, my job here is a complete declaration of what I would like to call a discovery, so that you can see as clearly as I the 'ology', as it were, of Psychology.

I will start with a discussion of the three components in principle so that we can gain an understanding of how the same characteristics may be manifest in different people. This will allow me to show how people in action together form transactions which can be *analysed*, again with an understanding of the part played by the different components. From there we can move on to the other half of the theory. By the end, I hope you will agree with me that this *is* a discovery; that, like Gravity, it is a great and simple one; but also that not everything is psychology, so that after all, there is such a thing as Transactional Analysis - and Synthesis.

## Parent, Adult, Child

To start with the most basic introduction and so ease ourselves in; what exactly is meant by those terms, 'Parent', 'Adult' and 'Child'?

In traditional Transactional Analysis the distinction is made between child-*like*, in the sense of spontaneous and intuitive, and child-*ish*, in the sense of immature or selfish. One's Child component is the source of the former and not the latter. '*Please* make me a cup of tea, sunny-bunny...'*'* is not my Child speaking, it is me being childish.

Or rather, it is me *pretending* to be childish...

And in that pretence; that play-acting; is found the reason for writing, not just for me with my particular writing, but writers everywhere, whatever their choice of material. I can be a Child when I write. That is, when my step is light and with a following wind I can express an aspect of pure me-ness; capture it and tie it down so as to *own* it! Then I don't need anyone else's thanks - though of course that is the eventual hope. Play-acting; pretence; creativity; these are the elemental attributes of the Universal Child.

The Adult is the rational, analytical part of you. In some ways it is the easiest for anyone to grasp simply as IQ. However, rather like horsepower for a car-engine, IQ indicates only a potential, and not how to best drive the car. The 'engine' needs use and care. It can be tuned, but one wouldn't take a Formula One car to the shops. One goes to school to be trained in using the 'engine' just as one takes a car-driving test, but experience is also needed. To complete the analogy, thankfully most eighteen year olds cannot afford a supercar.

It is the Parent which is most difficult. In traditional Transactional Analysis, it would be the mental legacy of one's own parenting but again, I think it is so much more than that. My working definition is experience, gained over time. It is this component which comprises that indefinable absolute, your spirit. In this sense it is connected not to the wisdom of our fathers but to the wisdom of our *forefathers*.

I would like to be able to tell you what that means, but the truth is, I don't quite understand it myself. What is the spirit? It's a question that is different for everyone. I *think* the Parent is the area of social facility. I *think* that it is formed irrevocably by experience and that, finally, it is the area of self-knowledge and knowledge about the world. But what is it, *really*? Well, maybe that is what we are here to find out.

Meanwhile I can use my working definition of experience, gained over time.

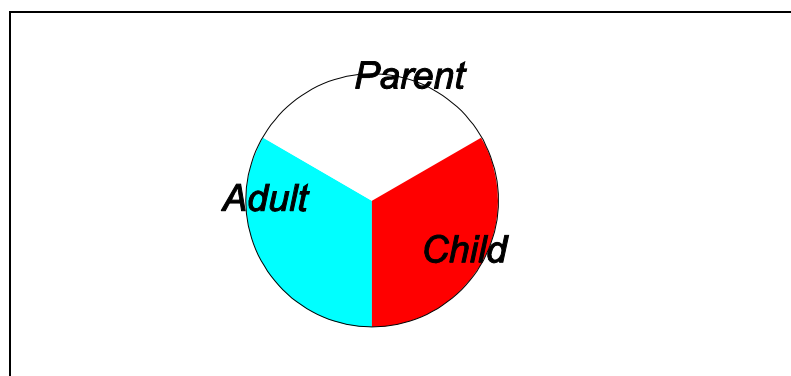
## Transactional Analysis

The table below gives what I hope is a fair summary both from my own point of view, and from the existing understanding of TA. Thus, if the Child is emotional, one's subjective judgement of it would be good or bad, whereas the criterion would be strength or weakness for the intellectual Adult, and either short-term or long-term for the effable Parent.

Table One

| Opposing Traits | Child           |                    | Adult              |                   | Parent               |                   |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
|                 | Good            | Bad                | Strong             | Weak              | Long                 | Short             |
| Parent          | <i>Creative</i> | <i>Selfish</i>     | <i>Honest</i>      | <i>Lazy</i>       | <i>Fair</i>          | <i>Practical</i>  |
| Adult           | <i>Caring</i>   | <i>Mean</i>        | <i>Disciplined</i> | <i>Inflexible</i> | <i>Conscientious</i> | <i>Moral</i>      |
| Child           | <i>Kind</i>     | <i>Obstructive</i> | <i>Sensitive</i>   | <i>Trivial</i>    | <i>Charismatic</i>   | <i>Attractive</i> |

I've used the intersection between components to add depth to the descriptions, with colour filling in the essential character of each component. Based on the three characteristics of *experience*, *intelligence* and *emotion*, it is beautifully clear to see that the passionate and creative **Child** is warm-bloodedly **red** in character, whilst the intellectual, analytical **Adult** may be coloured a cool **blue**. Meanwhile, as the colour of purity and perfection, we may initially colour the Parent a neutral, perfect white. This is the colour that is made when all other colours are mixed together, of course.



Let's start with an example. Characteristics are the fundamental way of describing personality so that, for example, I might say that my father was *volatile*, but not *ill-tempered*. My friend is *talkative*, but not *trite*. I am *combative*, but not *guileful*. In saying this, I am not revealing anything about the personal circumstances or history of either my father, my friend or myself, but I am still telling you something about each of us. You now know how we might behave in a general circumstance; and also something about how we might *not* behave.

To apply the theory in practice, we could go on to see that, where my father is volatile but not ill-tempered, he has a broad Child because it is self-evident that volatility has an emotional basis. Similarly, I may tell you that combativeness is fundamentally an attribute of the Adult. But what about talkativeness? Would that be primarily an attribute of the emotional Child or of the intellectual Adult?

If we were to view any initial characteristic as solely a function of the Child then *all* characteristics would soon become available to the Child (depending on how non-judgemental we were prepared to be) and, to take this to its logical conclusion, we would end up with *no* characteristics for the Parent; for, whilst initially we might be satisfied with broadly positive traits such as 'good-humoured', eventually we would begin to wonder whether *any* characteristic was really adequate to describe perfection...

Where the Parent is defined by an absence of characteristics, rather than their presence, then we lose the ability to distinguish it at all and this is reflected in the above diagram by the fact that the Parent is white; the same colour as the background. We can do better than this..

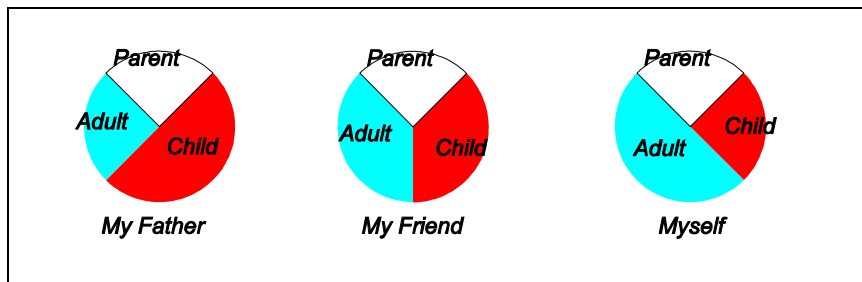
In order to introduce a meaningful separation we must redefine the Adult, and we must do so as an equal to both Parent and Child. That is to say, whilst it may be true that the Parent has the metaphysical quality of the conscience, it is still not *better* than the Adult, or Child.

Let us return to the car engine analogy. IQ is like 'horsepower' but a Formula One car is artificially constructed and maintained. Most cars are tailored for comfort (taxi or limousine), or safety (Volvo or 4 x 4) or for looks (Cabriolet, Porsche). We know that there are different types of car but is this really only saying that there are different types of people? In that case we would not be saying something that was only about the Adult.

The one thing that makes every engine useful is fuel – all engines need fuel to run. In the same way, your IQ does not function at its best when you are tired or scared, it best functions when it has a good, new idea to think about. So we can usefully say that the Adult benefits from good, strong ideals in the same way that a car engine benefits from a clean, steady supply of pure fuel.

It is often easier to be stubborn or perverse than reasonable and far-sighted. I would imagine it always seems easier to order one's children around than to respectfully ask them, as individuals. Only over the long-term does it become apparent that the latter is much the better strategy for both sides. What we learn from this is that, as much as the Adult is intelligent and clever it also benefits from being honest and moral.

The realisation that the Adult is as good as the Parent is the beginning of realising that the Parent is the heart of it, but we are not quite there yet. So let's try a different approach, with the Parent components of actual people, as in the diagram below.



Obviously, you don't know the people in question so you can't instantly tell how fair this assessment is of the three of us, but it is at least reasonable for me to try to compare myself with my father and my friend. I can and should try to understand them, by understanding how their Child and Adult components interact with mine, as long as I do not use this as a judgement of either. I cannot yet compare our Parents (if that is what I want to do).

My friend is talkative, and it would (in my view) be a short step for him to becoming trite, and it is only the strength of his personal conscience which prevents him taking that small step.

Having acknowledged his strong personal conscience, if it were only this however, one might have expected him to change his behaviour. Most people don't want to be fighting their conscience everyday. Neither, would I say, is it a facet of his Child. In the sense that it is a struggle, I think it is his intellectual honesty which forces him to avoid the easy option.



Your Parent helps you to decide what is right for you, but that is worked out within the moral framework of what is right for a given person in a given situation. My friend knows that talkative is right for his Child but he has worked out that trite is right for some people but not for him.

And if this moral framework is worked out intellectually then it means that a far greater range of characteristics may be assigned to the Adult than simple intelligence. When you don't steal because of the fear of getting caught your Child is simply acting in your own best interests. There is no conflict. Or if you steal and are punished, whether through being caught or owning up, again there is no conflict. But when you don't steal even when you would not be caught, despite the strongest temptation, then that is your Adult. That is your free will.

In fact, one's moral or immoral nature; one's honesty, dignity, self-restraint or loyalty; would all be a function of the Adult rather than the Parental conscience. So, where we would link the characteristics that are 'hot' - spontaneity, passion, creativity, humourousness - to the emotionalism of the Child, we can now link those that are 'cool' to the intellectualism of the Adult: those I've already touched upon such as honesty, dignity, courage and loyalty.

Which may be very helpful in understanding my friend's Adult, but fails to offer a way forward in pinning down once and for all his Parent.

I am fairly clear, for example as I have said, that one of the defining differences between the Parent and the other two components is experience. There is something utterly immutable about the acquisition of experience; you are born, you live, you die and you can neither exceed that experience, nor avoid it. In fact, there is something mutable in the Parent which makes the system work. The Adult and Child are - somehow - infinitely renewable; every day you are alive is a new day and you can't ever 'fill up' your memory, no matter how much knowledge you acquire. This is not so, in the Parent. Here, time passing does make a difference, and the ultimate renewal for the Parent is death. It may be inconvenient at the time but, on balance, you probably wouldn't want it any other way!

But, precisely because of this, experience is not really a characteristic in the sense that we have been using it. Indeed, none of the three fundamental characteristics I have been tempted to use; neither experience, emotion nor intellect; is unique to human life. A dog has a heart and a brain and a sense of itself - obviously. Even an ant has some degree of individuality, since it lives out a life, so what is it that marks out we people from the animal kingdom?

I am trying to include the reader in the reasoning by deliberately letting myself go wrong, and then correcting myself, rather than simply list all the new ideas in order. The trade-off for the current reader is that they work as hard as I do, and share the disappointment without firm guarantee of success. The only guarantee of a conclusion is at the end of the book, so the risk meanwhile is one will feel one was led up a blind alley.

I'm still not sure I'm right but I am slowly coming to the conclusion that there are three characteristics which are endemic to all of us to some degree or another, and which may mark us out from the animal kingdom. They are: kindness, bravery and humility.

For the Adult, the core component I would propose is courage. It is courage, the willingness to fight and suffer for what you believe to be right, which binds together mere intellectual knowledge into a moral framework and which may be seen to form the basis of those characteristics we've already assessed: honesty and nobility; or alternatively, deceitfulness and depravity.

For the Child, I would suggest kindness. Some might go so far as to say love, and in some ways it is quite tempting. A person who loves nothing and no-one is inhuman, by any stretch of the imagination, but love is a big word and it encompasses not only the generalised feeling of benevolence that a parent has toward a child but also the special feeling that one adult can have towards another. For this reason, I prefer kindness to describe the Universal Child.

For the Parent, the characteristic I would suggest is humility.

The great advantage of having this single characteristic is that we can observe it alone in both strength and weakness to extend our understanding of each component. For example, when present in strength, kindness may result in great compassion for others or, when weak, in great meanness toward a particular person, so that these may be said to be characteristics of the Child. Equally, when courage is appropriately placed it is admirable and even noble, but when misplaced it may be proud or arrogant, so that these would become characteristics of the Adult.

Now, we know where we stand with courage and kindness, but the case is rather different with humility. It is notoriously difficult to define. It is said that a monk was once asked to go on a mission to all the other orders in the land to find the great strength of each. Upon his return he went to the head Abbot and, after reciting off a list of the orders and the characteristic that each had as its strength - charity, piety, poverty, etc - he ended by saying his own orders name "and we are the humblest of all!" It makes you smile, of course, because humility is the one characteristic that recedes quicker, the more quickly you approach it. How then can we observe strong or weak humility?

Actually, it's like asking what is the difference between a good and a bad person. Any answer I give is going to fall short of being satisfying, but let me do my best. Let us say that to be humble is to act well without hope of eventual reward. There may *be* eventual reward, but that is not the basis for the behaviour. An example of this is giving money to a good cause. Very few of us gives as much as we can whenever we can, but some do. And some people give nothing, whilst most of us is probably like me, giving less than they can, and less than they should.

But we are not blind and we carry the burden of knowing that. You would expect that the person who gives nothing to have to make up for it eventually, at least to the conscience in their own mind. Similarly, the person who gives fully will find that they are rewarded eventually, if they just persevere. There is no especial reward for the rest of us: those of us who give occasionally and faultily. And no more should there be. We *know* that.

So, a person who is able to be humble in many areas of their life is a person with strong humility - but this may be contrasted with a person who is very strongly humble in only *one* area of life. It is quite tempting to consider that there may be two types of humility; what we might call social humility, as opposed to individual humility. To say that there are two types is like saying that there are two types of people; good ones and bad ones, all over again though. It may be so, but we are not the people who should make that judgement. There are likely as many types of humility as there are types of people. I think of my own single-mindedness when there is something I want very much indeed.

I remember when I first began to wonder about what humility actually was, and found that indeed it is one of the oldest theological problems. The argument goes back to Thomas Aquinas that pride is the devil and humility the answer. I felt that pride was too important; too closely related to courage, to be dismissed so fully.

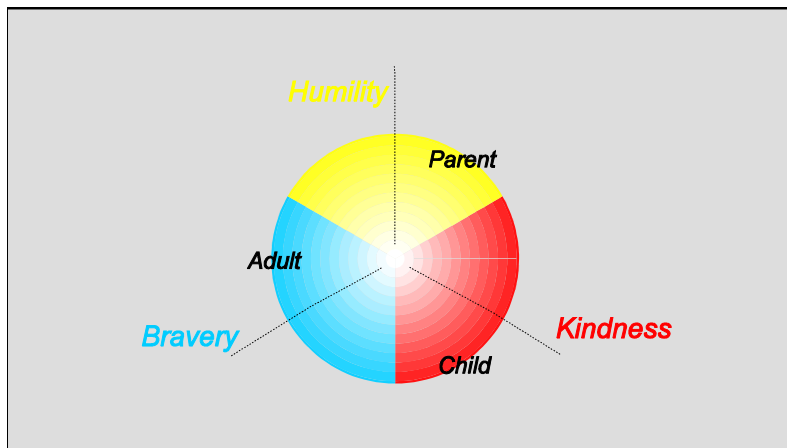
It may help to reconsider an alternative colour for the Parent. We have two primary colours in red and blue (or cyan and magenta), and this implies a third. It would give us the choice of yellow or green, in place of white to capture the essence of the Parent. Notice that we were not wrong in thinking of the Parent as white: this is the colour when all three of the components are mixed. It is just that that was not the best way of looking at the Parent.

At first glance, green seems a good choice being both the colour of nature and the colour of inexperience. At second glance, yellow seems just as good a choice being the colour not of a negative - inexperience - but of a true positive - happiness.

I think we can agree that perfection is all well and good, but we have lost nothing by putting it to one side in place of pragmatic happiness.

In point of fact, we gain something. By that I mean, what we see when we follow this through is confirmation of a sort, and that gains us confidence in our direction. Specifically, notice that courage is an attribute of the Adult, but yellow (which is the traditional emblem for the opposite of courage) is not an attribute of the Adult.

In other words, however much shame (from the Adult) one feels at failing to live up to the ideal of the hero, it is not ever a matter of conscience. Cowardice has never been one of the deadly sins against the conscience. As a reminder these, the Seven Deadly Sins, were: hate, lust, envy, laziness, gluttony and avarice. I am very happy that the final colour with which I have ended up for the Parent is the colour of happiness itself. These three primary colours may be mixed to make all of the infinite hues under the Sun. All are necessary, and neither one may be said to be better than the others.



This is the ultimate development of our initial discovery: the point at which the diagram reaches maturity, for now the mind is centred on the conscience (the white at its heart), which is the only appropriate psychological view.

This mind is indeed linked to those of our forefathers, but it does not contain them, for they are not lesser. Rather, the mind of the individual is connected to the infinite unity within it, whether one calls that the conscience; the subconscious; the unconscious; the spirit; or as I would prefer to: God.

I left pride out of the list of deadly sins deliberately, giving six in total. These could all be mapped to the component of the Parent but more interesting is to consider whether they can be mapped equally around the circle which would straightforwardly divide into six. As a fun exercise, you might like to try this for yourself before looking at my answer in the Appendix at the end of the book.

Now I don't know exactly how many characteristics there are in the English language - probably thousands. Gregarious, greedy, grave, great-hearted, green, grotesque, grouchy, grovelling, grand, grandiose, grandiloquent, and so on; but in my own judgement (knowing it is not right!) I have tried to develop the table of opposing characteristics into a continuum, to give a final flavour of each component, as I understand it.

**Table Two**

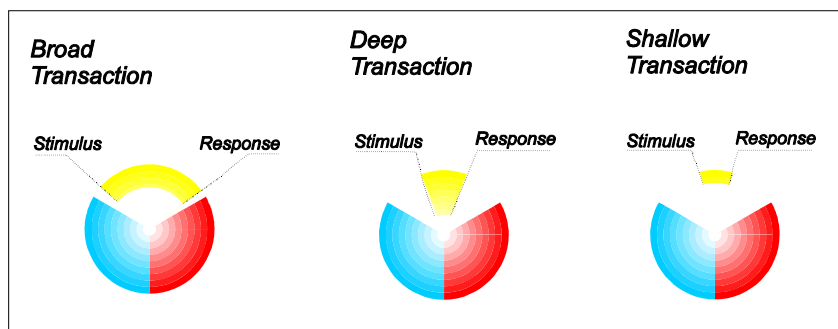
| <b>Gradated Characteristics</b> | <b>Excess</b>  | <b>Average</b>  | <b>Lack</b>  |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Parent</b>                   | <i>Indecisive</i><br><i>Foolhardy</i><br><i>Conservative</i><br><i>Deferential</i> | <i>Humble</i><br><i>Optimistic</i><br><i>Fair</i><br><i>Considerate</i>     | <i>Pompous</i><br><i>Cynical</i><br><i>Prejudiced</i><br><i>Uncaring</i>     |
| <b>Adult</b>                    | <i>Arrogant</i><br><i>Naive</i><br><i>Puritanical</i><br><i>Combative</i>          | <i>Proud</i><br><i>Innocent</i><br><i>Moral</i><br><i>Honourable</i>        | <i>Shirking</i><br><i>Pessimistic</i><br><i>Shameless</i><br><i>Perverse</i> |
| <b>Child</b>                    | <i>Ineffective</i><br><i>Spendthrift</i><br><i>Flighty</i><br><i>Obsessive</i>     | <i>Kind</i><br><i>Generous</i><br><i>Spontaneous</i><br><i>Enthusiastic</i> | <i>Ruthless</i><br><i>Miserly</i><br><i>Dull</i><br><i>Frivolous</i>         |

I still have not been able to come up with the definitive categorisation of characteristics to components. In fact, you may be interested to know that the assignment of traits to personality types, whether to groups of three, four nine or twelve types, is a long-established aim for those who would grasp the mind. It goes back to the theory of the four humours; melancholy, sanguine, choleric and phlegmatic in 2AD, and it may be found in fields as diverse as Chinese medicine (nine components) and the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

It is time to move on to the area from which Transactional Analysis takes its name. What is a transaction?

## Transactions

A transaction is simply an interaction of any kind between a person and the outside world, or a person and another person, or even between one person and a group of people, where the start (or stimulus) matches the end (or response). For our purposes, a transaction may be broad, or it may be deep, or it may be shallow.



A broad transaction would be one that takes place across the range, so to speak, of the personality, either through a long period of time or in a wide range of circumstances.

A deep transaction, as the name implies, would be one that involved the most profound part of oneself; for instance, a core belief; being either very painful or very pleasurable. All other transactions would then be shallow, although this is not meant to be pejorative, since between two people who don't know each other very well or who have no particular reason to care about each other, a shallow transaction would be entirely appropriate.

I have some examples for you. One is not pretty but it is true. One is both pretty and true, and one is simply true, being shallow. These are examples drawn from my own experience.

I've mentioned my father already in passing, but there is also a story to tell, about both of us.

My Dad died almost ten years ago. My mother has since remarried, but the Peter Cross I remember was a man of huge industry and seemingly bottomless cheerfulness. County Councillor and Chairman of the Board of School Governors, as well as the man's man who introduced me to Poker and Squash, I knew him to be utterly fearless, given to sentiment, and occasionally, gentle. Yet this is the same man of whom I could say when I was eighteen 'forgive, but never, ever forget'.

When I was born he was a pilot for British Airways (BEA as then was) having learnt to fly helicopters in the Navy. He didn't talk much about it, but he was from a working class background and his parents - my grandparents - had long been divorced. Unprepossessing and unglamorous as they seemed to my youthful eyes, it was astonishing to discover that they used to call my grandfather "the monster"; and that his drunken violence lasted until my father (who always carried a bit of weight) got old enough to physically restrain him by sitting on his chest.

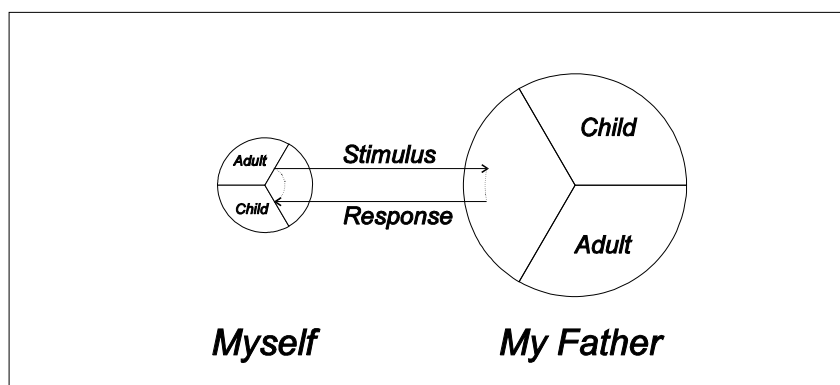
Before they had any of their six children, my father and mother decided that my father would be the sole disciplinarian in the house, and it was a decision that they stuck to throughout their married life. I only found this out later. My parents always presented a united front to their children - or rather I think now, they always hid their united front from us - and we had no way of knowing that only my father's sense of justice held sway.

I worked this out for myself when I was eighteen. Up to that point, my father was simply unfair, and I might have hated him for it, if I had wanted the fight. However, one day, I was playing with a plastic bucket in the back

garden, idly dropping a big stone into it again and again, when the inevitable happened. The stone caught the side of the bucket and went straight through, holing it.

What to tell my father? I could tell him the truth but I knew from long experience that he hated that kind of spiritless vandalism. Or, I could tell a complete lie. If I said I had just plain lost my temper, kicking the bucket and so holing it, then that's the sort of thing he could have seen himself doing. The trouble was, it was utterly out of character for me. What if he realised my manipulation? I loathed that sort of guile myself as much as he loathed spiritlessness but, after all that had happened, it didn't seem so bad.

And when I did, it was like a revelation! Not only did he take the lie completely at face value but he even didn't mind about the bucket! It was almost as if he was relieved that I was human, like him. I remember thinking to myself, how could you ever hate a man whose sense of justice was so *simple*! From then on, until he died in my late twenties, all of the heat went out of our relationship. But the transaction which was for me so deep and broad was one of painful imbalance, for I am convinced that, for my father, it was no more so than any other transaction that day.

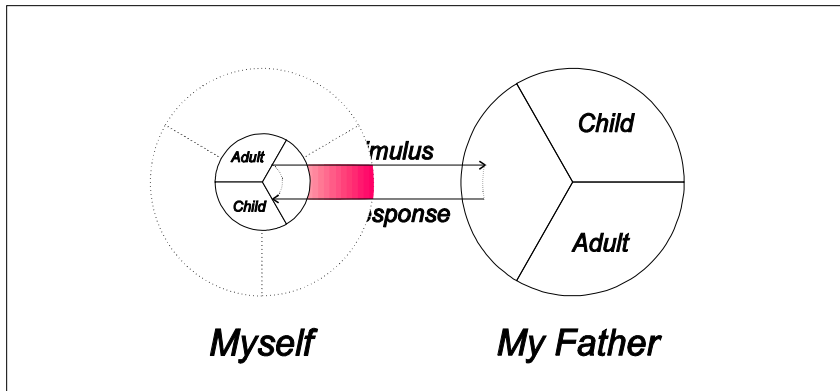


The story, and even more the diagram above, seem to point to a mighty judgement as indeed I promised myself, in my eighteenth year. Yet I find that that is the last thing I would wish for now, as I try to grasp the difference between my father and the man, Peter Cross, not to mention my own question. There is something self-defeating in the idea that what I might be doing now, here where I am most at home is no more than the obverse of what my father would have done, in his own home.

In that case, the point of view from which I would wish to look at this transaction is not that I am *better* than my father, as his early life may illustrate. I did promise not to introduce my own psychology into the subject but not to do so now would not seem quite honest, so I will try to keep it limited. Notice then that one of the things about this diagram is that I have quite naturally drawn it with my Parent facing that of my father, even though I was the child.

In the world that I live in, where the punishment of one's own conscience is always equal to the gravest crime that can possibly be committed, the greatest sin can sometimes seem to be to act inappropriately to the situation - wasteful, as it were, both of the opportunity of circumstances and the potential of the individual. For this reason, it would be complete anathema to me to consider that my own behaviour might be utterly inappropriate to the situation; yet here I seem to be proposing just that, in seeing myself as Parent in relation to my own father!

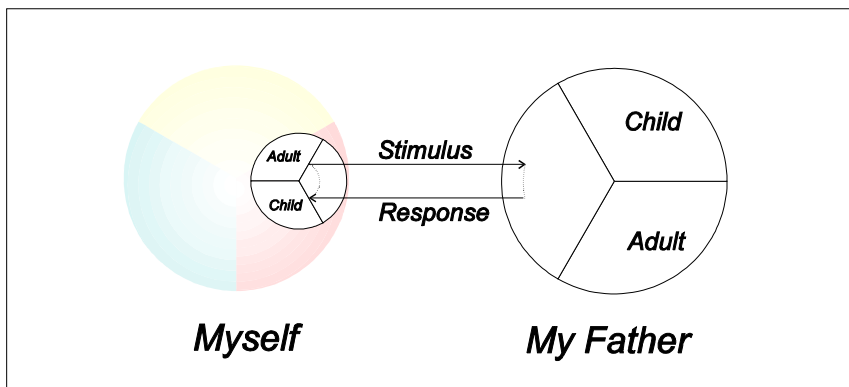
As I said above, all of the heat went out of our relationship following this one transaction, but why was the heat there in the first place? Well, the smaller circle that I drew above represents the *role* I was trying to take, just as someone might seek a supporting role in a drama rather than the lead, but our circles are, in reality, the same size and, from the point of view of analysis, this is the understanding which I would like to reach.



When I was expecting my father to be fair, in the sense that I understood it, I thought his sense of justice must be terribly complicated and, in the intermediate diagram above, we can see where this friction was incurred between us for all those years, in the red area, where my Child is too close to him.

All my life the problems which have been most difficult for me; the ones which one would have thought must have the most complex, intransigent and complicated solutions, have often turned out to be the most awesomely simple, should one be prepared to see it that way.

So it was when I quietly understood that my father's sense of justice, far from being as monolithically complex as I had come to expect, was actually so simple. When I realised that it was not my mother and my father, it was just my father, I felt as much sympathy as blame for him, and I would no more seek his understanding of my inner Child than I would inflict its demanding complexity on his. We were not close, and we would never meet, but I still played squash and poker and drank beer and talked frankly with him.



The final diagram above, I think, shows both the immediate effect of the incident I've related and my final position with respect to my father. The orientation had changed away from conflict with him because I knew deep down inside that I would never be my father, even if I were to have him for a father, all over again.

In fact, after this I became a bit of a defender of my Dad to my elder brothers. They, of course, had it worse than me, just as my younger brother had it much better, but I felt that, whatever my Dad had done to us, it had not involved his conscience. He learned his sense of fair play from the Navy, and it was a Naval strictness that he tried to apply at home.

There is something to find out about myself as well from the diagram above since it shows how I learned to wear my conscience very much upon my sleeve, in the presence of authority. I do not think this is entirely an admirable trait. I've noticed how trying it can be for another person; besides if, as the phrase above had it, you live in a world where the conscience is King, then to *always* wear it on *both* sleeves, as I have deliberately done sometimes, can be less than righteous. Still, the best thing about this whole section is that there is nothing in it to which I think my father would object - something which I think really is worth saying!

Now, let's move on to an example which I think is pretty as well as true: the point of saying to another person "I love you".

Whereas one's family is possibly not a matter of personal choice - on either side - clearly this is a matter of both free will and mutual choice. That is why I should normally expect broad transactions of the former and deep transactions of the latter, however I am not married and I have yet to say this for myself. Instead then, let me tell you about another thing for which I have felt a similar feeling; the writings of John O'Hara.

One day I may get the chance to tell you all about him, but there isn't the time or space here to do that. Still I think he is one of the great American writers of the Twentieth Century. I may be pre-empting myself by saying it because it is the subject of proper discussion later, but if you go back to that first diagram of me, my friend and my father, you can perhaps get a hint of how people can be fitted into types. Whereas for me, Fitzgerald is a little light and Faulkner a little heavy, this is the basis on which I would say that Steinbeck, Hemingway and O'Hara are all of a parity, so that were we to make the leap, Hemingway's spare, muscular prose would mark him out as the Adult compared to Steinbeck's Child-like love of people and, of the three, it would be O'Hara who was the most overtly Parental, to my taste.

I came upon him quite by chance one day in the library. It was a change in that it wasn't somebody I had already heard of, and also in that O'Hara was not a plot-based writer. His metier was the short story, of which he wrote some four hundred; along with fourteen novels. I've tried to read all of them, but even though he enjoyed great commercial success until he died in 1971, I think there are only two of his books still in print. I've lent them out and found that others don't like him, yet to me he represents the end of a particular road.

That may say more about me than about O'Hara, of course, but the very first book I read ('The Collected Stories of John O'Hara'; ISBN 0 330 29605 1) came with an introduction about his way with dialogue. This brings us back to the subject because a conversation is a classic form of transaction, and the excerpt that I would now like to reproduce represents a transaction that I think is worthy of examination here.

Have a look, if you will.

#### EXTRACTED FROM 'JAMES FRANCIS AND THE STAR', BY JOHN O'HARA

In the five or six paragraphs preceding this extract we have learnt that James Francis is a successful Hollywood screenwriter and that he is a patron, as well as a friend, to a struggling, would-be film-star, called Rod Fulton.

Prior to this, Francis has just given Fulton a long lecture telling him to watch his weight, and Fulton replies:

"Well fortunately I like to take exercise, and if I never had another drink I wouldn't miss it."

"Fortunately for me, my living doesn't depend on how I look."

"You do all right with the dames."

"Some dames," said James Francis. "If you can't make a score in this town the next stop is Tahiti. Or Port Said. Or maybe a lamasery in Thibet."

"What do they have there?"

"What they don't have is dames."

"Oh," said Rod. "What did you say that was?"

"A lamasery. The same as a monastery."

"Do you think I ought to read more, Jimmy?"

"Well it wouldn't hurt you to try. But you don't have to. Some directors would rather you didn't. But some of them don't read any more than they have to."

"I wish I could have been a writer."

"I wish I could have been a good one," said James Francis. "But failing that, I can be a fat one."

"Well, you're getting there, slowly by degrees. You're the one ought to start taking the exercise, Jimmy. I mean it."

"Oh one of these days I'm going to buy a fly swatter."

"A fly swatter? You mean a tennis racket?"

"No I mean a fly swatter."

"You bastard, I never know when you're ribbing me," said Rod Fulton.

What O'Hara is concerned to show us in this conversation is that these two men are peers, for the same reason I wanted to explain who are O'Hara's peers. Clearly there is a potential imbalance of power in the relationship between patron and protege and O'Hara feels that the best way to establish that this isn't the case is with a direct conversation, but its a good transaction for us because it has a dramatic climax, a resolution, and a conclusion.

Rod begins with an open comment about himself - this is one of the most appealing things about O'Hara's characters in conversation. They will often begin in this open way, leaving themselves vulnerable. And indeed, James Francis' reply "...my living doesn't depend on how I look." does contain a slight rebuke. Rod's next comment, if slightly gauche, is well -intentioned "You do all right with the dames". Now the brash comment is corrected by an extremely sophisticated remark by the writer "Some dames. If you can't make a score in this town the next stop is Tahiti. Or Port Said. Or maybe a lamasery in Thibet." He first mentions Tahiti, showing an awareness of its unusual sexual culture; he then mentions Port Said, a notorious Western Gomorrha; and finally - the coup-de-grace - he trumps the previous two with a glib spritual reference. It's a bit too smart for Francis' own good though, his creator is telling us this is an experienced man; perhaps dissolute.

As Rod makes a straight factual enquiry "what do they have there?" we realise he has not yet grasped the point. James Francis now shows the nature of the friendship because he finds a way to point this out to the actor without offending his dignity "What they don't have is dames." In turning the question around James is gently, and not without humour, pointing out his friend's ignorance.

And now we come to the climax of the conversation, the point of open acknowledgement of James Francis' current superiority which the conversation has been working up to. Rod Fulton not only asks James for a judgement but he specifically acknowledges the relation by the use of his name "Do you think I ought to read more, Jimmy?" It is a crisis of sorts because James Francis can assert that supriority once and for all if he wants to, but if he does, then this will cease to be a relationship of equals because he will then have refused the offer of trust that Rod is making.

And James Francis makes exactly the right response. He defuses the situation with a gentle "Well, it wouldn't hurt you to try. You don't have to." Offering a patronly warning of "Some directors would rather you didn't" then even redirecting the sting of that with the acid "But some of them don't read any more than they have to".

Following this climax, the tenor of the conversation changes. Firstly, in acknowledgement of his reply Rod makes the flattering (because almost certainly not true) comment that he'd like to have done James' job. James doesn't acknowledge the compliment (probably feeling patronised - he knows he's bright) but he begins to end the conversation with a light-hearted reference to the early subject of his weight. Again however, Fulton displays his mettle, and although his over-Parenting of James is not as pleasing as the former exchange ("You really should get some exercise. I mean it, Jimmy!") the mere fact that he knows it is appropriate, is enough. The fragile equality that the two men have established is underlined by the rough humour which O'Hara determines should be the end of the exchange.

We must move on, and so I will say that it is always the broad and deep transactions which are most rewarding to the participants, and most tempting to us as observers. I sometimes think they have the appeal of a psychoactive drug, but sadly, such that are genuine will be few and far between. And as with drugs, the apparent allure of glamour may easily turn out to be hollow, for which reason, it would always be better to be satisfied with a shallow transaction that is genuine than with anything which is not.

We are coming to the end of this brief introduction to TA and, in the final section, I want to concentrate on just such a shallow transaction to demonstrate exactly what I mean.

At work, I was recently asked to program a service that I think bears more than a passing relation to the remit of this article. The service is used by a Company for recruitment. It requests graduates to answer a series of questions about themselves by pressing numbers on a telephone keypad, from which the Company hopes to gather together a personality-profile of the applicant.



Supposedly, there are no right or wrong answers, so the applicant is encouraged to answer both honestly and spontaneously, through a time-limit. Here are three examples of the fifty-or-so questions:

“I want my co-employees to be my friends”

“I make it a point to learn the names of all the people I meet”

“I am a highly-disciplined person”

Now, I may be wrong but I *think* that the basis of these profiles is the empirical observation of Parent, Adult and Child types. Clearly, the discovery that I have made has been available to be observed since at least the time of Freud. Without a solid theoretical foundation empirical observation must remain a hit-and-miss, rule-of-thumb affair, but although it may be shallow, it may prove advantageous for now to maintain the assumption that it is well meant. So, on a scale of 1-5, if five is strongly like that, three is no more than averagely inclined, and I is very much *not* that way, what would your responses to the above questions be?

Well, I find it very hard to discipline someone if I think they won't like me for it so I would be a five on the first one. I'm terrible with names so I would be a one on the next, but I am very ambitious when it comes to work so I would rate myself as five on the third one, as with the first.

Before reading on, perhaps you would like to try a little test. Pretend you had to assess each of these statements as relating to one and only one of the three components and see if you can decide, in each case, which one it would be. Using this understanding, you could even analyse your own answers, if you gave them, but I will be using the ones I gave earlier. However, I'll be giving you a big clue if I say that the second word of each sentence is highly significant, given that the emotional Child relates to desire, the intellectual Adult to belief and the pragmatic Parent to actual practise, so do it now, if you want to.

In the first case, “I want my co-employees to be my friends”, strong agreement (or disagreement) with this would be more likely through the Child than through either the Parent or Adult.

In the next case, the second statement is also about oneself in relation to other people but, “I make it a point to learn the names of all the people I meet” is an offer rather than a demand, showing both social awareness and commitment. (The word 'learn' might momentarily make us tend toward the intellectual Adult, but the practise implied in 'I make' seems to tip the balance.) Agreement with this statement, rather than disagreement, would indicate the Parent component in operation.

Finally, the third statement is about oneself in general: “I am a highly-disciplined person”. Now, here the trait of discipline has already been identified as strongly indicative of the Adult, and the certain belief of “I am” adds further weight to this. In the most extreme case, one could insist that any single statement about oneself comes from the self-aware Parent, yet we ruled out such dogmatism at the start when we accepted the continuity underlying the Parent-Adult-Child divide.

Did you come to the same conclusion of Child, Parent and Adult for the three statements, respectively? I'd be quite surprised if you did! I have had five years to put my theories into practise, and I'm trying to explain them in, so to speak, five minutes. However, these personality tests are increasingly common and I have come across them a number of times in job interviews myself. They seem to work. For instance, on the basis of my response to the three questions (strong agreement, strong disagreement and strong agreement) my Adult and Child components would be very strong whilst my Parent would be very weak. Whilst that might be a harsh assessment of the person that wrote this article it is not, I think, an unfair comment on me in my role at work.

Notice that there is absolutely nothing shallow about this! There is no real ambiguity about the significance of each of the statements, and neither is there any uncertainty about the significance of the answers. In the context in which we are discussing it, the proposition that “there are no right or wrong answers” and the time limit are merely devices, like my use of O'Hara's conversation above.

Yet I was not deliberately trying to mislead you when I myself stated it was shallow! The reason why relates to the opening explanation - or failure - of our discussion regarding the nature of characteristics. Part Two, which discusses the principle of the work-role as a whole, therefore also has the elliptical purpose of leading on to my final conclusion, about why this transaction is still shallow and why, perhaps, it has to be!

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