Eric Berne and the Developing of Transactional Analysis

Dr. Eric Berne is the originator of Transactional Analysis (TA). He was born on May 10, 1910 in Montreal, Canada, as Leonard Eric Bernstein. His mother was a writer and his father a physician. His grandparents on both sides had immigrated to Canada from Poland and Russia. Eric Berne accompanied his father on his visitations. What he witnessed there influenced and shaped him throughout his later development. Eric Berne’s father died at the early age of 39 years. His mother encouraged Eric Berne to study medicine. He graduated from university in 1935 at the age of 25. A short time later he emigrated to the U.S., became an American citizen and shortened his name to Eric Berne. He worked as a psychiatrist in hospitals as well as in his own practice near New York City. A major influence of these early years was Paul Federn. Federn was a physician and psychoanalyst and one of Sigmund Freud's first students. Now Eric Berne ranked among Federn's students. He worked as a psychiatrist in hospitals as well as in his own practice near New York City. A major influence of these early years was Paul Federn. Federn was a physician and psychoanalyst and one of Sigmund Freud's first students. Now Eric Berne ranked among Federn's students.

During World War II Berne worked as an army doctor. Here he had plenty of time and leisure to develop his first reflections on his work and he began to write. Shortly after, in 1947, he published his book „The Mind in Action“, as an introduction into psychiatry and psychoanalysis. In the same year he continued with his studies in psychoanalysis, this time in San Francisco.

Concurrently, he began a training analysis with Erik H. Erikson, a well-known representative of the psychoanalytic “ego-psychology”. Erikson was also a student of Sigmund Freud. Similar to his encounter with Federn, Berne was influenced by his encounter with Erikson. Many of the ideas about the “ego-states” and all its manifestations which Berne was to develop later found their initial impetus here. At that time Berne had already been divorced after a short marriage. In California he met a woman whom he subsequently married. She was also divorced and had three children. Their marriage produced two more children. Berne was said to be a caring father who, nevertheless, knew to withdraw himself at times to study. During this time in Carmel, California, Berne produced several more publications.

Berne developed his decisive ideas about Transactional Analysis between 1949 and 1958. Most of the central TA models originated from this time. The development of his ideas can be traced best through a series of articles that were published between 1949 and 1962 and released in 1977 as a book under the title “Intuition and Ego-states. The Origins of Transactional Analysis“. In 1956, when Berne was 46 years old, his application for admission as a recognized member of the Psychoanalytical Association was refused. He was asked to seek further training and then apply again. It was among other things this refusal that encouraged him in his concern to take psychoanalysis in his own direction. Already since the early 1950s Berne had offered clinical seminars in his own home in Monterey, where he tested many of his ideas. Between 1955 and 1962 Berne developed the concept of the “ego-states”.
In 1957 the term “transactional analysis” appears for the first time. The concept of transactions and the theory of “games” followed between 1962 and 1966, and shortly before his death, between 1966 and 1970, Berne developed his basic ideas about the theory of “script”. These central models create the foundation for TA as it is known today.

The time in which Eric Berne developed his ideas was a very busy one. At times Berne had two jobs plus a contract as counselor simultaneously. In addition, he worked in the town where he lived and in San Francisco in private consulting practices. This diverse work environment gave him ample opportunities to test his concepts and models, to discuss them, refine them and review them over and over again. On one hand, TA was inspired by Berne's psychoanalytical studies, on the other hand it received major impetus from the conceptual reflection of his practical work.

In 1958 Berne founded the „San Francisco Social Psychiatry Seminars for the Study of Transactional Analysis and Social Dynamics“. The Seminar was organized as a non-profit company and in 1962 started publishing the „Transactional Analysis Bulletin (TAB)“. From 1959 on it offered so-called “TA 101” seminars, an introductory course into TA. In 1964 the „International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA)“ was created, thus TA became institutionalized. Since 1971 it publishes the „Transactional Analysis Journal (TAJ)“ which replaced the TAB.

Berne's last years were still marked by a lot of work and publications. After a second divorce he married again in 1967. However, this marriage did not last either; it ended in divorce in 1979. He finished the manuscript for his last book, „What Do You Say After You Say Hello,” only a few weeks before his death. Eric Berne died on July 15, 1970, in Monterey, California. He was 60 years old when he suffered a fatal heart attack. He left behind 75 of his own publications (articles and books), as well as 11 contributions as co-author.

The following titles give an overview of the main publications by Berne, with the year in which it was first published:

- The Mind in Action (1947), updated and later published as A Layman’s Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis (1957),
- The Origins of Transactional Analysis (on the basis of a series of articles between 1949 and 1962, released in 1977),
- Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy (1961),
- Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups (1963),
- Games People Play (1964),
- Principles of Group Treatment (1966),
- Sex in Human Loving (1970),
- What Do You Say After You Say Hello (1971)

Today the development of TA by Eric Berne is referred to as “classical school”. After Eric Berne’s death TA continued to develop. Many of his immediate students took his ideas and enriched TA through
their own additional contributions. This development was furthered by a specific characteristic of Berne's practical work. He took great care to write and speak in plain language that could be understood by everyone and to share his models with his clients. In this way he invited them to continue to work with these models, to write their own stories, to modify, adapt and develop them for themselves. This approach is still applied today.

Moreover, many of the models were developed through precise observation. This invites users to this day to further develop the system of TA through their own observations and experiences. This has preserved a culture of dealing with the concepts and models of TA characterized by practical try-outs and by combining them with models of other schools of thought. It is largely for this reason that TA evolved considerably beyond psychotherapeutic applications. And even within these areas a large range of theoretical and practical contributions has been created over time.

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