

Foreword

FOR some years students of general semantics have been making increasing use, in their lectures and their writing, of transactional psychology. Meanwhile, students of transactional psychology have simultaneously been showing increasing interest in general semantics. The affinity between these two approaches has resulted in this present Special Issue on Transactional Psychology, in which the Editors of *ETC.* are happy to introduce some of the most distinguished exponents of the transactional point of view, along with other contributors who, in their several ways, show the relation between general semantics and transactional psychology, and the relation of both of these to some of the most pressing intellectual problems of our times.

The word "transaction," drawn from the language of business, was endowed with its new meanings by John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley in their book *Knowing and the Known* (Boston, 1949), reviewed in this issue. A transaction, in the language of everyday life, is an exchange of values. The Dewey-Bentley word acquires its new dimensions of meaning from the unexpected contexts in which it is placed. For Dewey and Bentley "transactions" occur whenever there are knowers-to-be and to-be-knowns. The knower-to-be is never the passive absorber of light-rays and recorder of sounds and impressions. He is a ferment of abstracting, projecting, and integrating activities. And on what he has integrated, he "makes his investment," "places his bets," or, in short, acts. And if the to-be-known "pays off," it can be regarded as "known"—at least until it ceases to "pay off," in which case a new integration is necessary. In other words, the "reality" we have to deal with, described often in modern philosophy of science as the relationship between the observer and the observed, is, in the language of transactional psychology, a "transaction," in which the knower brings to any event the entirety of his past experiences and integrations, and in which the known brings whatever it has to bring. And "reality" is neither within the knower himself nor in the known itself, but in the "transaction" between the two.

This way of talking and thinking about human experience is itself "paying off." Already the transactional point of view has proved fruitful in several fields. Earl C. Kelley's immensely provocative *Education for What Is Real* (New York, 1947) draws out the implications of transactional psychology for educational theory and practice. It has lit fires in art theory, too, as is attested by Norman T. Newton's *An Approach to Design* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951) and Hoyt L. Sherman's *Cezanne and Visual Form* (Columbus, Ohio, 1952). In

psychology (perception theory) and in the social sciences, transactional psychology is also making fundamental contributions.

It all began in the basement of the Choate House in Hanover, New Hampshire. There, in the later 1930's, Mr. Adelbert Ames, Jr., who, among other things, was an expert in physiological optics, a designer of lenses, and founder of the Dartmouth Eye Clinic, was demonstrating to a small but interested public a set of ingenious optical illusions. What gave fascination to these illusions was the fact that there was discernible in them a pattern—a common denominator that made vividly concrete some half-suspected but not-too-well-understood relationships among perceptions, actions, and purposes. There was something about the illusions deserving of systematic explanation. Why, for example, does a *rotating* trapezoid painted to look like a window look, instead, like a rectangular window *wigwagging back and forth*? Why does it continue to look this way even when we know that it is rotating? What is "stimulus" and what is "response" when the "responding" organism appears to play a considerable part in creating the "stimulus"? Korzybski had made the same point in another way when he used to rotate a set of flat blades (arranged roughly like an electric fan) until it looked like a disk. "Where is that disk?" he would ask. Then stopping the mechanism so that the blades were again apparent, he would say, "You *made* that disk inside your head!"

Mr. Ames, as director of the Hanover Institute, in cooperation with such men as Hadley Cantril of Princeton University and Earl C. Kelley of Wayne University, continued to study the implications of these illusions. In 1946, some of the demonstrations were moved to Princeton, where they were first set up in the basement of a dormitory.

Now the Ames Demonstrations and their not inconsiderable literature are safely out of the basement. They are being used in at least 130 research centers scattered through 19 countries. There is a Perception Demonstration Center at Princeton University, and at Ohio State University Ross Mooney and Hoyt Sherman have established the Visual Demonstration Center. And most importantly, the conceptual framework provided by Dewey and Bentley has clarified the questions and sharpened the research instigated by the demonstrations.

KORZYBSKI referred to his program of general semantics as scientific, *epistemological* retraining and education. The revision of language as such was not his goal, unless such revision emerged from the *revision of basic assumptions about the nature of our knowings*. Transactional psychology is important to students of general semantics because it enriches and challenges their basic theoretical formulations, and because it confirms their central perceptions through a wealth of experimental evidence of a kind that they themselves have been slow to produce.—S.I.H., J.R.K.