

## Talk by Fanita English on Receiving The Eric Berne Memorial Scientific Award for The Concept of Rackets as Substitute Feelings

First: my thanks to those who nominated me for this award and to those of you who voted for me. As far back as I can remember, even grade school, there has never been a prize or formal recognition that I ever wished for as I did for this award. I suppose it has to do with the fact that Eric Berne's ideas transformed my life in a radical way. Yet there is also sadness as I remember that Eric Berne, David Kupfer, and Fritz Perls, the three mentors who influenced me in developing my concepts, are now dead. And I think of my son Brian who died last year. He would have been pleased to see me this moment. In his memory I am donating half of the award money to the Brian English Memorial Fund at the University of Chicago Lab. School and the other half goes to Amnesty International, the organization dedicated to intervening on behalf of prisoners of conscience.

In thinking of Eric Berne as a living person, I remember that it was his expressed frustration about dealing with the rackets of his patients that led to my interest in the subject. Of course Berne could identify rackets almost instantaneously. To confront them he would pointedly refuse to stroke them, but this did not lead to cure, rather to unjust accusations about his being insensitive and untrue to his own concept about stroke exchanges as the basis of communication. So I got to wonder about what it is that underlies rackets, and why it is that even though a person's rackets are often quite evident from the outside, the individual who is under their sway not only fails to recognize them as such, but actually invests much energy in seeking strokes for them, even to the point of discounting other experiences or strokes that may be available.

Berne and I had planned that at the 1970 summer conference we would discuss my clinical material that pointed to the substitution factor in rackets, but with the news of his death I lost interest in the subject. At this point, I want to pay tribute to Frank Ernst who, as guest editor of *TAJ*, urged me to contribute my article. It was too long, and I believe I would have junked it had it not been for Frank who agreed to publish it in two parts. So I feel rather rueful about receiving this award in a year when he was also one of the nominees. I hope he receives it next year.

When Muriel James called about my preparing a speech for this award, I was on my way to Europe. On the plane going there I thought that I would talk autobiographically about my own slow movement in recognizing my rackets. I would describe how surprising and difficult it was—and still is—to experience the feelings they cover up.

Specifically, I discovered that I tend to operate with a certain form of tough courage that wards off awareness of scare or grief when such are aroused in me. This pattern served me well in childhood and also on various subsequent occasions, for it is characteristic of rackets to become reinforced by being used at every opportunity even though their main function had to do with survival in childhood.

Having reduced my tendency to depend on racket substitutions, I sometimes still ask myself—What's so great about learning to acknowledge grief or fear when they come up rather than bringing on, at such moments, the seemingly more pleasant racket reaction of courageous toughness? A difficult question, particularly under the overwhelming impact of Brian's death.

I suppose the value of experiencing genuine emotions or reactions, even painful ones, has something to do with a sense of personal integrity. Consciously or unconsciously, I believe that each one of us yearns to tap into her own individual essence rather than represent whatever comfortable emotional attitudes she may have learnt in childhood. When we don't communicate with our inner self we pay a hidden toll through the reduction of our spontaneity, creativity and ability to relate. Still, there is a tremendous pull to want to run away from authentic self-awareness. It seems so much easier to hold on to a mask, even when I am by myself.

Anyway, if one holds on too much to one's rackets, as time goes on even their spurious value gets reduced. For it turns out that even in relation to their own category of allegedly "acceptable" feelings rackets will gradually erode a person's ability to use appropriately even those feelings or attitudes that are recurrently manifested through the racket. For instance in my case, in spite of my "courage" racket I note that over the past decade I have not demonstrated sufficient moral courage to come forth and take a clear stand in relation to issues or practices that I object to on human or scientific grounds. By pretending to myself that I was becoming "reasonable" or "tactful" I avoided recognizing a fear that I would be criticized for my views. So paradoxically at times my courage and toughness rackets actually circuitously *prevented* me from using the courage I needed to express myself sufficiently on certain unpopular issues that I cared about.

All this is what I was going to elaborate on tonight, except that my plan transformed itself while I was in Germany and Switzerland under the impact of the news that came through about the tragedy of Jonestown, Guyana. Inevitably parallels were drawn between the followers of Jones and those of Hitler, and the personalities of these two men. I was asked: Can TA and rackets theory help us elucidate the dynamic process involved in those instances and in other, less dramatic but similar relationships? Definitely yes, said I, and it is from mulling over this subject that I decided to convert my planned talk to a discussion of this theme.

However, to proceed I do need to refer you to some additional theory I have developed since 1970, particularly on the subject of "racketeering" and the manner in which this process, which is engendered by a person's rackets, also harmfully serves to petrify him or her too inflexibly into what I call a "defensive" existential position.

I've written on the subject and you might want to look up the reference later. For our purpose here let me first name the two complementary defensive positions. They are: (surprise)—"I'm Not OK—You're OK" and "I'm OK—You're Not OK." But note that I emphasize the word "defensive" in that my concept is a little different than was Berne's on this point. I consider that either one of these two positions is arrived at to ward off total Not OK feelings of despair. These are first experienced by the six-month old child at the point of burgeoning individuation, away from the euphoric connection to mother. Such despair gets forgotten but tends to want to re-surface into awareness at certain critical stages of life, classically at the two-to-three year old period, then again at adolescence and then again at about age 30, although it threatens to surface or erupt also at other times under conditions of stress.

At those times we confront, with varying resources, the feeling of having "fallen from grace" because of having unwittingly bitten into the apple of the tree of knowledge. It tells us that life is not smooth and that we must deal with many contradictory feelings within ourselves while also having to relate to confusing behavior in others.

It is during the two-to-three year old age period, the same age period at which rackets originate, that we also develop our basic existential position.

Popular parlance refers to this stage as the "terrible twos" because the child seems negativistic. Actually, she is trying to establish who she is, and one way to try to do so is to see how far she can go in opposition to her caretakers without losing their protection. There ensue numerous overt and covert power struggles between the child and her principal

caretakers, following which she settles on one of the two defensive existential positions. She chooses the one which seems the most effective to ward off despair.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, the 18th Century philosopher, said that everybody emerges out of early childhood either with a "slave" mentality or with that of a "tyrant." These terms can well be applied to the extremes of the two defensive existential positions, for finally at about age three the child decides either that she must submit, be a "slave" or that she'll have to keep trying to find ways to control others at all costs, *i.e.*, become a "tyrant." Whichever position she settles on henceforth determines her character and her future attitude in relation to power issues, particularly at times of physical or social stress. Of course, most of us do also develop the more stable position: "I'm OK. You're OK for real," but the distinction between the two types of basic characters is still worth making, particularly when we want to make distinctions in extreme cases.

As a less dramatic designation than "slave" and "tyrant," I call "Type I" "unsure" those people who seek strokes from an "I'm Not OK, You're OK position." They tend to transact with others from either a compliant or rebellious Adapted Child ego state, sometimes "helpless," sometimes "bratty." They seek strokes from people who impress them as having powerful Parent ego states, hoping that it is such people who can offer them a key to the riddle of existence. In everyday life they appear as "victims" or "rebels."

In reverse, Type II persons operate from an "I'm OK, You're Not OK" defensive position having rather desperately resolved that no one else can offer them any hope, and that their only chance for survival in an uncertain world is to stamp it with their personal view of reality, to convince or force others to participate in their image of the world. So they operate as "sure" acting "helpful" or "bossy." They seek out partners or followers who will transact with them from a compliant Adapted Child ego state, will acknowledge them as Powerful Parents, and will thereby offer them validation for their grandiose illusion of being "sure." They relate as "rescuers" but become "persecutors" when they don't obtain gratitude or compliance. Finally, they may end as victims.

Both types have a way of finding each other, and up to a point this may be fine, because they can then indulge in complementary stroking to their heart's content, but if they are endowed with heavy rackets calamity may follow.

For this is where the issue of rackets comes in. Remember, a few light rackets cause no harm, but heavy, persistent rackets mean that the person is not truly capable of dealing with his underlying emotions and lacks a solid sense of self. Therefore he is likely to be excessively needy for strokes to his rackets, and overly concerned about validating and reinforcing his defensive existential position. For it is by means of our defensive existential position that we ward off the despair that pushes to manifest itself as hopelessness in Type I persons and murderous rage in Type II persons. By definition persons with heavy rackets, or 3rd degree "racketeers," as I call them, cannot stand awareness of such feelings because they do not distinguish between *feeling* and the likelihood to *behave* in unacceptable ways, and this is why they are so dependent on their rackets as substitute feelings in the first place. But it follows that they seek and/or receive strokes for their unreal substitute feelings, as a result of which they are never really gratified within themselves. All the less do they feel gratified within the kind of complementary racketeering that takes place in 3rd degree racketeering partnerships, because both the giving and receiving are artificially induced and received—like eating de-vitaminized food. This only exacerbates the hunger all the more, like drug addiction which falsely seems to energize while inducing starvation. So the seeds for mutually killing each other off are there from the beginning even while mutual racketeering stroking is taking place and temporarily seems to please both parties.

Although there is probably a fairly even distribution of both character types in the general population, when it comes to heavy racketeers there appear to be more slave types than tyrants, or perhaps it's that not all potential tyrants have the necessary skills to inflict their views of the world on others beyond a certain point.

Anyway it does look as though there is a higher proportion of extreme Type I persons who continue to operate, even as grown ups, with the belief that somehow there can be a way for them to bask in an illusory paradise run by a Father or Mother figure. They seek to abdicate from the awesome responsibility of sorting out their own feelings and thoughts out of the welter of mutually contradictory attitudes and feelings that appear in themselves and in others. In most instances such yearnings remain manageable as fantasies or behavior within the bounds of every day reality, and they get played out only in minor ways through typical stroke transactions with more forceful partners. But there remains the unappeased yearning to "escape from freedom" as was eloquently described by Erich Fromm in his book by this name. When such persons are offered the "opportunity," by seemingly benevolent tyrants, to be led into a haven of relief from anxiety about autonomous existence, this looks like an offer they can't refuse. At last:—no more anxiety, conflict, concern about one's less than adequate ability to make difficult decisions about the direction of one's life. Here's a Powerful new Parent who can tell them exactly what's right and good and how they can belong. He seems to offer love and understanding for their craving. To blend with him, to become one with him as humble members of whatever community he sets up seems like a happiness worth sacrificing for:—here come all my money, my relationship with former friends and family, my autonomy, for you, Great Leader, who can offer me Ultimate Answers, who can make me feel good by believing in you, and, therefore in the validity of what I'm doing. It is this longing to escape from autonomous functioning that led so many people to embrace Nazism as the golden hope that would "free" them from disillusion. They were vulnerable to the "enchantment" of promises from persons such as Hitler or Jones because probably in their own childhood they had felt forsaken or overpowered in their attempts to experience themselves as free-standing creatures, and had substituted illusions for awareness of disappointment.

Before Fromm, Dostoyevsky used a fictional Type II "Grand Inquisitor" to critically describe the "Type I—Slave" mentality:—

"So long as man remains free he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find someone to worship. . . . Man is tormented by no greater desire than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which he is born. . . . Man prefers peace and even death to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil."

Dostoyevsky also described how such people get themselves bound into a system:—He points out that: "these pitiful creatures are concerned not only to find what one or the other can worship, but also to find something that all would believe in and worship; what is essential is that all may be *together* in it. This craving for *community* of worship is the chief misery of every man individually and of all humanity from the beginning of time. For the sake of common worship they've slain each other."

In effect, both Fromm and Dostoyevsky describe the need, in "slave" type persons, for a mutual stroke racketeering relationship with a great Parent that dominates a community of Adapted Children who seek to share, without question, the same dogma and the same system of beliefs with which their reality gets defined for them. Within this setting they develop pseudo-intimacy by means of Child-Child transactions with each other. It is only pseudo-intimacy because it's predicated on the maintenance of their Adapted Child in continuous real or imaginary racketeering transactions with the Parent Ego of their powerful leader.

*Time* magazine (December 11, 1978) gave some excerpts from "Letters to Dad" written to Jones by his followers. They illustrate the pathetic self abasement that was stimulated in his followers by the system, and how it led to increasing his dominance and their abject dependency. For instance: "I use to spend money in buying unnecessary things for my grandchildren such as clothes. Now I want to please you and one way I know is to please the Family."

Another: "I don't respect Dad the way I should. When I am in a follower role and not in a supervisory role, I feel threatened that people are against me which isn't true and comes back to my elitism."

Another: "Dad—all I can say is that I am two people right now—one of them is a very humble and innocent person and the other is a cruel and insensitive person that goes around with bad thoughts on his mind."

Another: "Another fault is that I miss soda, candy, pie, etc. which I shouldn't miss at all. The way I can prevent this is to work extra hard."

"Father is wonderful, clean, straightforward and supernatural."

And lastly: "I know I still follow you because you have the gift to protect me. I like to look strong, but I know I am weak." (Following which, she accepted his order and drank poison.)

Still, one interesting aspect of such a system is that many individuals operating within it actually seem to be more organized and functional at their tasks than before they entered the system. This is because allegiance to the leader and to the group he controls offers them a measure of security and "freedom" from conflicts within their conscience or inner life. This "frees" them from dealing with contradictory or unpleasant emotions. Their Adult appears decontaminated, but actually it's decontaminated only from their free Child or from their previous Parent. Instead their Adult is programmed by their leader's definition of reality, reinforced by the community. Being "free" from anxiety about the dilemma of being human, they even think clearly when they have a good I.Q. but actually it's still within a rigidly controlled framework, so their clear thinking is only on narrow issues. Within a concrete context such persons can often think more logically than average citizens as long as their basic premises remain unchallenged and reinforced by the community. To this end, they reinforce each other in their mutual belief system, and this in turn reinforces their allegiance to the leader. Thus bureaucracy within Facism and Nazism functioned better than under the previous government. Trains ran on time, shipments to concentration camps were handled with discretion and efficiency. Similarly, building and agriculture were carried on effectively in Jonestown. Jones' young lieutenants were able to master intricate financial transactions and they made public statements which seemed clear and honest. So from superficial observation outsiders can believe that the members of such a community are doing *better* than they did before when they may have felt confused or unhappy and demonstrated more overtly their "unsure" character. So investigators from the American State Department and the Embassy in Guyana got to believe that the people at Jonestown were doing fine. They had become zombies, but they seemed to function well. They operated with "a stable conception of the object of life" without having to question it. (To quote Dostoyevsky again.) Even a hard-nosed lawyer like Charles E. Garry got fooled by the appearance of happiness in a certain proportion of members. After a ten-day stay at Jonestown, he described it as "Paradise on Earth."

The sad thing is that once such a system is established, it feeds on itself and diminishes even the physical ability of oppressed members to move out and evaluate themselves or their community from the outside.

Boundaries become more and more rigidly set and impermeable. Outside influence or intervention is feared even by those who suffer under the system, because it is the system that defines their reality and chaos looks like the only alternative.

Within the tight-knit system there develops a "pecking order" with sergeants and lieutenants who become a layer between the Big Parent and the "slaves." In this layer are a few unskilled Type II persons who may have joined for opportunistic reasons; mostly there are more intelligent or crafty Type I individuals who continue to be dependent on the Leader. Rather than becoming rebellious at him when they are disappointed by him, their angry Child acts out the anger on lesser "slaves." They have internalized a part of his controlling Child or Parent, usually the cruel persecutory aspect which they may have picked up by a process I call "episcripting" even before it becomes evident to outsiders. These lieutenants

become secondary pseudo Parents with the drive and permission to lash out at those beneath them under the guise of obeying orders. And they contribute to maintaining the community's rigid boundary; thereby eventually the whole community becomes episcrypted to enact whatever destructive patterns may have existed within the Leader all along, hidden even from him, since they were covered over by his rackets. Specifically, Jones was probably suicidal from way back, but his rackets prevented him from knowing it most of the time.

Which brings us to a description of Jones himself, as a tyrant type. He cannot simply be dismissed as "evil," "paranoid" or "cynical" from the beginning, and we need to account for his rise to power. It's in seeking to grasp the motivations of persons such as Jones that the theory about the substitution factor of rackets becomes crucially important. For I believe that at early stages of his career Jones probably saw himself as idealistic, loving, and devoted to the welfare of humanity. The trap is that this view of himself was probably based on a "love" or "benevolence" racket. I imagine that it covered over and hid awareness of his own inordinate craving to be loved over and above the average. In Type II individuals such a craving turns itself into lust for power. ("I'll make you love me, if it's the last thing I do!"). And beneath that, of course, sit suicidal impulses and/or murderous rage for *not* having been loved the way he wanted it prior to age three.

It is to be remembered that for a while Jones's rackets led him to make valuable social contributions. He fought racism, even to the point of adopting seven children of different races, he supported some of his followers and various liberal causes, he served effectively for the San Francisco Housing Authority. But as a result of his "love and benevolence" racket he found himself pushed to dish out and dish out concern and "love" to others while becoming increasingly hungrier and frustrated from not getting what his Child *truly* needed. Whatever he received got deflected to his power-hungry Parent rather than to his starving Child.

Initially his Child may have contributed excitement, energy and creativity, but as time went on the abject, needy rackety strokes from his followers failed to gratify his basic yearnings. It is no surprise that he was desperate about holding on to Tim Stoen, the 6-year old adopted child, when the latter was being claimed by his own parents, for Tim may have been the source of the few genuine loving strokes he was getting. Increasingly Jones had to depend, first on mass rallies, (quantity might make up for quality) then on alcohol and pep pills to boost up his "sure" attitude and reassure himself that he was not dying of depletion. From his emotional starvation came his inaccurate assumptions about being beset with a variety of physical illnesses, which is a typical syndrome in tyrant types when their sense of "sureness" begins to falter. Having moved from Benevolent Rescuer (his racket) to Persecutor (trying to enforce more control over his followers and manifesting eruptions of murderous rage while still holding a racket that kept him "sure" of what was "for the good" of his followers,) he was increasingly experiencing himself as potential Victim even before the self-created calamity closed in on him.

Why was there no effective intervention before it was too late?

For one thing there is a tendency to indifference in society at large and its individual members, who are themselves beset with their own anxieties about the problems of living and fear to "interfere" where it's "none of their business." And indeed the manner in which Congressman Ryan and the newspaper reporters got drawn into the tragedy illustrates that it can be dangerous indeed for unprotected individuals to confront a tight-knit system.

It is significant that already in June 1978 (the suicides happened in the middle of November) Deborah Blakey, Jones' Financial Secretary who defected (thanks to her opportunity to travel away from there) submitted an affidavit to U.S. authorities describing what was going on beneath the surface at Jonestown and warning that worse might follow. She described also how fearful she was of retaliation by the People's Temple for her "treason." But the Justice Department and the Attorney General responded simply

with legalistic briefs. When Congressman Ryan arranged for his trip to Guyana there were attempts by Jones' lawyer to intimidate him, referring to a "witch hunt," "persecution" and threatening "action against those agencies that "have violated the rights of my client" (Jones).

Another reason why outsiders often take a long time to identify the danger inherent in projects developed by persons like Jones is because of whatever valuable contributions they made in the past. Given the fact that they believe in their own rackets, they are able to convince many that they are of good faith, even if they do seem to be off base on occasion. How can one challenge someone who is as dedicated and unselfish as Jones seemed to be and who can point to the valuable help he gave others? It's this kind of thing that used to frustrate Berne when he identified the seeds of dangerous behaviors in such types of persons but recognized that early intervention is often ineffective.

Eventually, after increasing success in building up followers and admiration, persons such as Jones do get themselves wound to destruction within the net of whatever mutually shared magical belief gets developed in their community. They start out believing, as do their followers, that they can omnipotently solve the world's problems if only people will do "it" their way. (This was also Hitler's stated belief, and this may also be the tragedy of Dederich at Synanon.) When the magical process fails to succeed *totally* there develops increasingly frustration in both leader and followers. Frustration and resultant anger get denied by both, lest their air-tight system explode from the puncturing of their shared illusion about the leader's omnipotence. So positive mutual stroking transforms itself increasingly into negative stroking, particularly by the leader on the followers who get blamed for everything that goes wrong, and they in turn accept such blame rather than confront their leader. In rare cases where some followers challenge or try to defect, the group exterminates them, literally or figuratively. The group continues to try to remain tightly knit in spite of the internal combustion that might get it to explode from internal pressure or external intervention. So a given individual can get himself entrapped into a dangerously violent system through having a confused or frightened Child and ultimately, when his Adult is operational, (sometimes thanks to the system), he may be so enmeshed into the system that it is too late to cry "uncle." Then his best *apparent* Adult option may be just to "go along" and save his life—or his relative sanity, which may appear to be improved as long as he stays in the system and does not "waste" energy fighting it.

Change can come from the outside. But then sometimes the cost to all can be terrible. For instance there was war against Nazi Germany and death to Congressman Ryan.

While our sympathy goes primarily to Jones's innocent victims and to Ryan and the murdered newspaper reporters, Jones also can be seen as deserving of sympathy. One wishes that somehow his activity could have been investigated and restricted earlier, even for his sake, and to my mind the Government of Guyana and the American Embassy and State Department carry responsibility for having been too superficial in checking. I am sure that for a long time, and even up to the end, too much of Jones's self image was based on his racket of benevolence and love. He invested his life and energy into making his followers depend on him at all costs, unto death. He perverted the concept of freedom as meaning his followers' "freedom" to let him dominate them, and his freedom to abuse them in all ways in the name of "caring" about them.

Typically individuals like Jones have a talent for distorting and converting to their own ends every concept that they are destroying. Words like freedom, responsibility, self respect, caring, and love get co-opted into representing rackets rather than profound meanings. In hearing such leaders often one feels helpless at clarifying just exactly how their meanings somehow don't ring true. Surrender and trust, beautiful in a loving relationship, become: Capitulation of the free Child to the grandiosity racket of a misguided Parent. This sad phenomenon can be witnessed in certain couples' relationships, in certain

families, in certain religious or psychological movements, and, more tragically, in communities such as Jonestown and Synanon.

Commenting on Synanon, Max Lerner identified the seed of tragedy as lying in the "surrender of individual choice both to the leader's decision and to the group's pressures." If an individual allows himself to be "stripped naked" within such a setting, then inevitably he becomes all the more dependent on the leader and the group for the psychological guidance that he failed to give himself in the first place by delivering himself into the system.

To consider all this is very important for therapists and ministers. We enter a power role whether our temperament calls for our being tyrants or not. Those of us who, like myself, have Type II characters need to be particularly careful about not getting caught into mutual racketeering with Type I patients.

As TA theoreticians we have yet much to learn about the separate functions and interconnections of ego states. One goal in therapy is to help a client become free of archaic dictates from the past and to scrape off contaminations in her Adult. But then, when this happens, is it our Parent that our clients need to take on? I submit that our clients can be helped to use their Adults in the service of their *own* free Child rather than in the service of a parent, external or internal, even when such a parent is well intentioned. We do need to recognize that, sadly, it is possible for grown individuals to feel, think, act, and yes, vote from a confused or scared Child ego state that masquerades as Parent or Adult. And it is also possible for seemingly "adult" contracts to be made between two contaminated racketeers.

In hearing of the deaths in Guyana, Rabbi Maurice Davis, who had sold Jones a synagogue within which was housed the First People's Temple in Indianapolis, said: "I keep thinking what happens when the power of love is twisted into the love of power."

Concluding the above quoted article, Max Lerner states: "We have still to resolve the mixture of authority and self help that is best for therapy and religion. But until we do, the Buddha's remark on his death bed may be worth recalling: 'Work out your own salvation with diligence'."

To do so on earth I believe it's important for Type I individuals to acknowledge their yearning to be controlled, and for Type II individuals to acknowledge their yearning to control. Neither one of these tendencies leads to satisfactory solutions for life's problems, and both yearnings relate, not only to our childhood experience, but also to all our unresolved questions about the value of our existence.

And for me, probably the first step in dealing with my unresolved yearnings is to acknowledge what I feel, even when I don't like it, and to realize that it may be impossible to "live happily ever after."

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