

THE USE OF LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES IN INTERPERSONAL
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The term "Logical Consequences" was suggested by Dreikurs in 1946 (1) to clarify some confusions which were apparent in understanding the earlier concept of "Natural Consequences", originated by Herbert Spencer more than a hundred years ago. Spencer did not differentiate between situations where the child experienced an unpleasant result of his own behavior and where the parent "arranged" it so that the unpleasant result was achieved. In the present concept, the term "Logical Consequences" (or L.C.) is used to denote the latter condition. (4)

It is rather interesting to note, however, the Spencer's hypothesis conforms markedly with current practice in using L.C., though he made little effort to detail its application to other than the parent-child relationships. In his discussion, he describes the bearing of the natural consequence to the safety principle inherent in the behavior of all living organisms:

"When a child falls or runs his head against a table, it suffers a pain, the remembrance of which tends to make it more careful; and by repetition of such experiences, it is eventually disciplined into proper guidance of it's movements.
. . . So deep an impression is produced by one or two events of this kind, that no persuasion will afterwards induce it thus to disregard the laws of its constitution." (6 p 161-3)

Though not designated as such, the logical consequence was clearly defined, as well, by Spencer:

Having refused or neglected to pick up and put away the things that children scattered about and thereby having entailed the trouble of doing this on someone else, the child should on subsequent occasions, be denied the means of giving this trouble. When it next petitions for the toy-box, the reply of its mamma should be "The last time you had your toys you left them lying on the floor and Jane had to pick them up. Jane is too busy to pick up every day the things you leave around and I cannot do it myself, so if you will not put your toys away when you are done with them, I cannot let you have them". (6, p170)

Perhaps the only modernization this suggestion might need to broaden the child's area of choice would be for the mother to suggest that the child could not have the toys until he was ready to put them away after he used them. This then places the focus of responsibility of him rather than on the mother.

It is not hard to see that, in the authoritarian era in which Spencer lived, his concept would attract little notice. Until Dreikurs proposed substituting logical consequences for punishment as an improved method of correcting childhood misbehavior, the only other educator of note since Spencer to suggest their use appeared to be Piaget, in 1932. He described "distributive justice" as denoting L.C., and "retributive justice" as defining punishment. (5 p203-4) However, he appeared to doubt the value of distributive justice in disciplining small children in his view that they seemed to understand arbitrary punishments better.

Perhaps the primary reason why the use of L.S. appears to be more effective today than punishment in correcting child misbehaviors would seem to be related to the breakdown of the old authoritarian traditions in our present society. Children no longer accept parental authority as being absolute; as long as they did, parents usually felt little need to explain but only to enforce their prerogatives as being right and just. Now, in a culture where there are no longer absolutes, children must learn to experience the results of their own actions in a way that leads them to make their own decisions regarding future behavior. Correct utilization of logical consequences provides an unpleasant result to unsocial behavior, but not one that would be harmful to the child.

The concept has also been found to be particularly effective in school behavior as well. (2,4) Though the presence of the group makes it difficult for the teacher to ignore many behaviors which the parent can do safely at home, there are many situations where the teacher can provide a consequence for incorrect classroom behavior with satisfying results.

One might ask the question: what about the use of L.C. with adults? There could seem to be little quarrel with the fact that with the deterioration of authoritarianism in our culture today we are increasingly called upon, as adults, to make decisions the results of which intimately affect our well-being and how satisfactory our relationships are with others. We cannot avoid the consequences of our behavior whether we wish to or not. But adults have a remarkably persistent and often painful ability - which children, luckily, do not - to avoid seeing the effects of these consequences through the use of various mechanisms. Loss of his job is often the logical consequence of a man's inefficiency on the job, but if he can blame it all on an autocratic boss, he fails to see the corrective effect of the consequence to him. One of the necessary outcomes of psychotherapy would seem to be the capacity to develop awareness of how the consequences of our acts affect us, so that we can avoid the same mistakes in the future. But, whether or not logical consequences can be utilized by the therapist as a tool in this process seems questionable, until this awareness has been achieved.

The need for specific exploration or research in this area would seem to be imperative. Certainly, if means could be formulated to help adults to benefit from the unpleasant results of their unsocial own acts, the use of logical consequences might become of great value to the clinician in the therapeutic setting. The apparent success of some of the more recent confrontation and "reality" therapeutic techniques would seem to suggest that there are possibilities in utilizing logical consequences with adults that need to be more thoroughly explored.

Bibliography

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