

Michael Reddy

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Transactional Analysis got its name when that's what it was all about - the analysis of transactions between people. This usually meant spoken transactions, but a smile or an embrace, a frown or a bullet would also be included.

This was back in the mid-fifties, and the same systematic analysis of social interaction remains virtually unchanged in every orthodox presentation of TA theory. But today it functions more as a foundation stone, and is simply taken for granted in most of current TA therapy.

The superstructure which has been added over the last 20 years to these early foundations has changed TA from a theory of social interaction to a more and more complete *theory of personality*.

Language

A theory of personality is in one sense simply a *language*. It is a word system which 'explains' certain overt behaviours and (in most theories) some processes which are not open to inspection. If it is a good theory it will explain more and more behavioural events with a minimum of new words added.

In my own experience TA vocabulary has the twin merit of being 1) relatively simple and non-technical, which means it can be shared with the patient, and 2) surprisingly fertile in stimulating fresh insights into the sources of behaviour, while remaining within its compact framework.

Eric Berne, who inspired if he did not actually invent most of TA theory, maintains that any piece of writing should be capable of being read with equal pleasure by an MIT professor and a Minnesota farmer. Read his books and one is likely to come across the Hot Potato Game, the Little Professor, See What You Made Me Do, the Electrode, Waiting for Santa Claus (or perhaps Rigor Mortis), What Happened to Cinderella *after* she married the Prince, and What Little Red Riding Hood was really up to (to say nothing of grandmother).

The colloquial style of much TA writing should not blind one to its serious intent. And Berne's description of himself as a 'cowboy therapist' does not do justice either to his sophistication or his success. True, his talk of 'curing' patients used to make his fellow psychiatrists blench, but he was a great enemy of therapeutic systems designed to help people 'make progress' at the expense of actually getting well.

As a result, most TA therapists are fairly directive, and usually prefer to make things happen rather than to sit through a hundred sessions waiting for some 'process' to take place.

In practice of course few if any TA therapists are (and certainly he himself wasn't) as brash or cynical as Berne sounds. At the same time it is true that in screening professionals who want to train as TA therapists, the selection procedures of the International Transactional Analysis Association place great emphasis on the therapist's 'potency' - meaning his ability to act as catalyst to a patient's growth.

It might be worth noting here, in parentheses, that the fairly strict qualifications laid down by the ITAA mean that the quality of TA therapists is of a high average.

Brief overview of theory

What is TA about? A brief survey of the major theoretical propositions of TA would do the whole system an injustice and an extended survey is out of the question here. What might be of value to the general reader at this point is a rapid overview of the development of TA therapy, and then a look at two characteristic concepts.

The starting point of the whole system lay in Berne's observation that his patients seemed to be at any one time in one of three possible 'ego states', as he called them - either 'Parent' 'Adult' or 'Child' ego state. And he noted and checked with his patients that such states were distinguishable both objectively (to the outside observer) and subjectively (to the patient himself), and that different kinds of characteristic behaviour flowed from the particular ego state the person was in.

The second stage of TA was Transactional Analysis proper. This was the period in the late fifties when Berne published his seminal articles.

The third stage saw more attention devoted to the analysis of those extended series of transactions called 'Games'. This was the period (about ten years ago) which saw the publication of *'Games People Play'* - a book which has all the merits (and the limitations) of a best seller.

The fourth and foreseeably the last stage began in the late sixties, when attention turned to the whole matrix of an individual's life script, into which his favourite games fit. That means the whole complex of his rackets, injunctions, basic position, existential positions, etc. This period has been marked by the publication, shortly before his death, of Berne's last two books, *'Sex In Human Loving'* and *'What Do You Say After You Say Hello?'*

Rackets

Two of the most central concepts of TA theory are rackets and decisions. 'Rackets' implies a reversal in the everyday understanding of the emotions. Normally one thinks of emotions as triggered by a specific stimulus, with a logical connection between the emotion and the stimulus. Thus the sight of a child being cruelly mis-treated will make me angry, I'm sad when someone I love goes away, I'm apprehensive when I have to see the dentist, I'm excited at the thought of a holiday, I'm remorseful at thoughtlessly having brought unhappiness to someone, and so on.

Undoubtedly many of our emotions are released in this way. But in some instances the stimulus may be considered as 'neutral'. The best way of illustrating this is to use Bob Goulding's classic example.

Imagine there are three men driving to work in identical cars along an identical route at precisely the same time.

One of them, by the time he reaches the office, is extremely angry. He says that the traffic 'made' him angry. *'You stupid idiot! Cutting in like that', 'Will she, for crying out loud decide which lane she wants?'*

The second man when he arrives at work is feeling very confused, and he says that the traffic 'made' him confused. *'I wonder if I should get into the inside lane now or wait till later', 'M.4 East 1¼ mile, West 1½ mile - my God, which is East and which is West?'*

The third man by the time he gets to work is feeling extremely guilty. He says it is what happened in the traffic that 'made' him feel guilty. He feels guilty about shaking his fist at a driver who cut in, he feels guilty about tail-gating a driver who would not get in one lane or the other.

There is a good chance that what we have here are three 'rackets'. A racket is a particular feeling to which one individual regularly returns as if by choice. When he is emotionally disturbed he is likely to express that disturbance as anger, in one case, confusion in another case, guilt in a third, or embarrassment or hurt or inadequacy feelings - or whatever it is. This is his 'favourite' bad feeling.

Closely allied to the concept of rackets is that of 'stamps'. Not only do people revert to their racket feeling spontaneously, as a magnetic compass returns to North, but they 'use' these feelings in order to win a pay-off. Thus Ted has an angry racket, and he collects angry feelings from situations that occur, like some people collect Green Shield Stamps from their shopping. And like Green Shield Stamps, Ted pastes his angry stamps into a book until he has enough to cash in for a prize - which may be a row with his office staff, or a day off work, or a guilt free Sunday of golf. He may even be going for a big prize and will save up hundreds of books of stamps to trade in for a divorce.

Thus Ted arrives home having already collected a few pages of angry stamps at work. His meal is not ready and he gets another page full, he is landed with the baby for ten minutes and collects another page. Finally he sees the telephone bill. There is uproar (to his wife's surprise, since he had seen similar bills before) a slammed door, and it's pretty clear they will not be making love that night, which is possibly what Ted had at the back of his mind all along.

Rackets are very important in therapy. One can guarantee that all but a few exceptional individuals use their emotions in this way - that is they have one or two favourite rackets.

A racket is like a thread. It points forward, through an examination of the 'pay-off' it periodically affords the individual, to the kind of ultimate pay-off or denouement he is sub-consciously heading for.

It also acts as a thread leading *backward* through the individual's emotional history to a time when the racket was adopted as part of a complex of decisions about what the individual was to think he was worth, what other people are worth, and what life is about. When the individual is led back to some of the early situations where he began to choose his individual racket as the safest and most appropriate way to feel, he can much more easily get in touch with sentences, the 'myths' which rule his life. A good part of the power of these myths lies in the fact that the words have been forgotten. Or perhaps they were never actually spoken. Sentences like: - *'I'll never make it'; 'If they know what you really want they'll stop you'; 'I should never have been a girl'; 'I want you to prove you love me'; 'Don't enjoy yourself, you'll only have to pay for it later'*. And so on.

Decisions

It is this matrix of feelings, conclusions and decisions which shape much of the person's destiny, the games he plays, the kind of work he will do, the kind of person he will marry, and even, in some case (especially with suicide scripts) how he will die and when.

The decisions which the child makes are the product of his own perceptions (frequently distorted, of course, in that they are often registered at a pre-verbal stage, and also because they may well be the fruit of a child's inexperience, magical thinking, etc). At the same time, these perceptions are based on the 'messages' he gets from parents and others.

It is in this sense that every child is the victim of the irrational elements in the personalities of the powerful figures of his early environment. Some will recall actual (spoken) messages, as did one current juvenile delinquent: *'You're going to be just like your father. I wish I'd never had you'*. He remembers hearing this when he was still quite young, and concluded that mother would only really be pleased with him when he was dead. He is fortunate in that he has been able to recall this decision. If he had not, there would be little chance for a redecision. As he said, when asked how and when he would die: *'About 20, probably shot running away from the cops'*. And he would probably have managed it - totally unaware of his hidden suicide script.

The more or less exact form of the decision is important. Thus a much-decorated Vietnam veteran (and present U.S. champion in a particularly dangerous sport) suddenly became aware in a group of a major decision he had made as a young boy. This time it was directed towards father: *'I'll show you - even if it kills me'*. That he had not succeeded in killing himself or getting himself killed was due more to good luck than good management.

Or again, an early decision: *'If things get too bad I can always kill myself'* will be much more drastic in its consequences than the decision: *'If things get too bad I can always get out of here'*.

Probably most decisions are not as melodramatic as these - though one might look for such decisions in any successful suicide, and there are enough of them. But, if not as melodramatic, early decisions can have a no less significant impact on one's lifestyle: 'I'll never let them know how I feel', for example.

In most cases it is more accurate to talk of a complex of decisions, large and small, rather than one single, all-important decision. But it is this complex of decisions which determines a whole life in its most significant aspects, and which is the main target of TA therapy.

There is thus a double aspect of TA therapy. On the one hand it underscores the mechanisms by which an individual was programmed to behave, think and even feel when he was young. On the other hand it begins to become clear that this individual's characteristic behaviour, thinking and feeling was in some sense also *chosen* by him.

True, it was chosen in response to the pressures of the situation he found himself in. But the point is that what was once the subject of a decision can now be made the subject of a re-decision.

It is with this stress on the possibility of re-decision that TA joins the characteristically existential stream of much of the third force in modern psychology, which insists on the individual's responsibility for his life.

To put it another way, people usually have more options than they are aware of. Their additional options may not have been available at the age of four, or if they were might well have been unrealistic. Whether the individual at age four was smart enough to take the only safe option or whether he was not so smart is beside the point. The fact is he now has at least as much and probably more information, and is no longer dependent on powerful figures in his environment for his psychic (not to mention physical) survival.

Merits and Demerits

First, as a system, TA has the merit of a certain coherence in that the germ of every major element in it comes from the head of one individual. And yet it also has the richness which comes from contributions by many others. It may be a surprise to some that this is the thirteenth year of publication of the TA Journal (formerly the TA Bulletin).

It should be said too, however, that the very richness of its concepts and of the prolific flow of insights it has continually generated is beginning to put a strain on the seamless robe of TA. And the best current thinkers in TA anticipate that this tension will continue. Eric Berne himself said he hoped TA would self-destruct in twenty-five years, by which time it would no longer be appropriate as a reflection on the individual and social realities of the day, just as Freud's theory (originally designed for hysterical reactions in the sex-inhibited women of Victorian Vienna) has changed in the process of its evolution.

The main weakness of TA as is acknowledged by many of its leading exponents, is that by itself it leads to the kind of insight which could remain purely intellectual. It can be just a headtrip.

The real potential in TA seems to lie in an alliance with one or more of the other humanistic psychologies of the last decade - systems which are orientated much more to the experiencing of feeling, such as Bio-energetics, Psychosynthesis, Gestalt, Encounter techniques and so on.

It is no accident, for example, that some of the best Gestaltists in the States use TA freely in their therapy, nor that the Gouldings (who run the largest single TA teaching institute) were close friends of Perls, and have Fagan and Shepherd on their advisory board.

If TA sometimes looks like a theory searching for a technique, some of the other therapies strike one sometimes as techniques looking for theory. Such marriages have already taken place between TA and other approaches are proving a potent tool for those whose script has landed them in the mysterious business of psychotherapy.

Ursula Fausset

THERAPIST-CENTRED PSYCHO-THERAPY

When beginning as a therapist, I was undoubtedly the centre of my universe. My needs were crying out to be satisfied. With my very first client, I needed to be seen as experienced, wise and confident and no one but the client could support me in this. Then I needed to know all sorts of 'facts' and details about their sex life and their childhood, in order that I could fit it all in with the theories I had been taught; so that I could understand just what was wrong and then, by subtle questions steer them towards the RIGHT answer. The theories at this stage were changing rapidly, so that it was a job for the client to keep his symptoms and insights up to date with my knowledge. There were also my emotional needs to satisfy. If I was in touch with my grief, then it soon became apparent that THE need of this client was to cry. If I had just been hit by my need to sleep with the builder, then my client was clearly (unconsciously) hung-up by his sexual guilts. As Jungian patients have Jungian dreams, so Ursula's were rapidly changing roles and ego boundaries, in order to help her find her therapeutic identity.

Fortunately this phase didn't last long. By the time I had gained enough confidence to charge a small fee, I had got the client doing all the work. As I sat there, umming and 'reflecting' back the odd phrase, my client was writhing and struggling with his soul, getting deeper and deeper into the mire, absolutely confident that he'd get no advice, that I'd answer no questions and not give approval or sympathy or encouragement of any description. My silence was clearly deep wisdom. The pain of this experience convinced people that it was doing them good.