Transactional Analysis

Transactional analysis, commonly known as **TA** to its adherents, is an integrative approach to the theory of psychology and psychotherapy. Integrative because it has elements of <u>psychoanalytic</u>, humanist and <u>cognitive</u> approaches. It was developed by Canadian-born US psychiatrist Eric Berne during the late 1950s.

Key ideas of TA
Some core models and concepts are part of TA as follows:

The Ego-State (or Parent-Adult-Child, PAC) model
At any given time, a person experiences and manifests their personality through a mixture of behaviours, thoughts and feelings. Typically, according to TA, there are three ego-states that people consistently use:

> **Parent ("exteropsyche"):** a state in which people behave, feel, and think in response to an unconscious mimicking of how their parents (or other parental figures) acted, or how they interpreted their parent's actions. For example, a person may shout at someone out of frustration because they learned from an influential figure in childhood the lesson that this seemed to be a way of relating that worked.

> **Adult ("neopsyche"):** a state of the ego which is most like a computer processing information and making predictions absent of major emotions that cloud its operation. Learning to strengthen the Adult is a goal of TA. While a person is in the Adult ego state, he/she is directed towards an objective appraisal of reality.

> **Child ("archaeopsyche"):** a state in which people behave, feel and think similarly to how they did in childhood. For example, a person who receives a poor evaluation at work may respond by looking at the floor, and crying or pouting, as they used to when scolded as a child. Conversely, a person who receives a good evaluation may respond with a broad smile and a joyful gesture of thanks. The Child is the source of emotions, creation, recreation, spontaneity and intimacy.

Berne differentiated his Parent, Adult, and Child ego states from actual adults, parents, and children, by using capital letters when describing them. These ego-states may or may not represent the relationships that they act out. For example, in the workplace, an adult supervisor may take on the Parent role, and scold an adult employee as though they were a Child. Or a child, using their Parent ego-state, could scold their actual parent as though the parent were a Child.

Within each of these ego states are subdivisions. Thus Parental figures are often either *nurturing* (permission-giving, security-giving) or *criticizing* (comparing to family traditions and ideals in generally negative ways); Childhood behaviours are either natural (*free*) or *adapted* to others. These subdivision categorize individuals' patterns of behaviour, feelings, and ways of thinking, that can be functional (beneficial or *positive*) or dysfunctional/counterproductive (*negative*).

Berne states that there are four types of diagnosis of ego states. They are the behavioural diagnosis, social diagnosis, historical diagnosis and the phenomenological diagnosis of ego states. For a complete diagnosis one needs to complete all four types. It has been subsequently demonstrated that there is in fact a fifth way of diagnosis. It is known as the contextual diagnosis of ego states. For example if a man says, "On July 5th, 2007 the alignment of the planets will create a magnetic field so large that there will be the biggest tides in half a
century", what ego state would be diagnosed?

If that man was of a dishevelled appearance, had not shaven for 2 days and was sitting on a park bench drinking out of a bottle in a brown paper bag what ego state would be diagnosed?. Probably some kind of regressed Child ego state. If that man was in an observatory wearing a white coat and carrying a clip board what ego state would be diagnosed? Probably Adult ego state. The different contexts for the same statement would tend to result in a different diagnosis. The context in which the statement is made is central to the diagnosis of ego states. Ego-states do not correspond directly to Sigmund Freud's Ego, Superego and Id, although there are obvious parallels: ie, Superego:Ego:Id::Parent:Adult:Child. Ego states are consistent for each person and are argued by TA practitioners as more readily observable than the pats in Freud's hypothetical model. In other words, the particular ego state that a given person is communicating from is determinable by external observation and experience.

There is no "universal" ego-state; each state is individually and visibly manifested for each person. For example, each Child ego state is unique to the childhood experiences, mentality, intellect, and family of each individual; it is not a generalised childlike state.

Ego states can become contaminated, for example, when a person mistakes Parental rules and slogans, for here-and-now Adult reality, and when beliefs are taken as facts. Or when a person "knows" that everyone is laughing at them because "they always laughed". This would be an example of a childhood contamination, insofar as here-and-now reality is being overlaid with memories of previous historic incidents in childhood.

Although TA theory claims that Ego states do not correspond directly to thinking, feeling, and judging, as these processes are present in every ego state, this claim is self-contradictory to the claim that the Adult is like a computer processing information, therefore not feeling unless it is contaminated by the Child.

Berne suspected that Parent, Adult, and Child ego states might be tied to specific areas of the human brain; an idea that has not been proved.
The three ego state model has been questioned by a TA group in Australia, who have devised a "two ego-state model" as a means of solving perceived theoretical problems:

"The two ego-state model says that there is a Child ego-state and a Parent ego-state, placing the Adult ego-state with the Parent ego-state. [...] How we learn to speak, add up and learn how to think is all just copied from our teachers. Just as our morals and values are copied from our parents. There is no absolute truth where facts exist out side a person's own belief system. Berne mistakenly concluded that there was and thus mistakenly put the Adult ego-state as separate from the Parent ego-state."

Transactions and Strokes

Transactions are the flow of communication, and more specifically the unspoken psychological flow of communication that runs in parallel. Transactions occur simultaneously at both explicit and psychological levels. Example: sweet caring voice with sarcastic intent. To read the real communication requires both surface and non- verbal reading.

Strokes are the recognition, attention or responsiveness that one person gives another. Strokes can be positive (nicknamed "warm fuzzies") or negative ("cold pricklies"). A key idea is that people hunger for recognition, and that lacking positive strokes, will seek whatever kind they can, even if it is recognition of a negative kind. We test out as children what strategies and behaviours seem to get us strokes, of whatever kind we can get.

People often create pressure in (or experience pressure from) others to communicate in a way that matches their style, so that a boss who talks to his staff as a controlling parent will often engender self-abasement or other childlike responses. Those employees who resist may get removed or labeled as "trouble".

Transactions can be experienced as positive or negative depending on the nature of the strokes within them. However, a negative transaction is preferred to no transaction at all, because of a fundamental hunger for strokes.

The nature of transactions is important to understanding communication.

Kinds of transactions
There are basically three kinds of transactions:

1. Reciprocal/Complementary (the simplest)

2. Crossed

3. Duplex/Covert (the most complex)

Reciprocal or Complementary Transactions
A simple, reciprocal transaction occurs when both partners are addressing the ego state the other is in. These are also called complementary transactions.

Example 1
      A: "Have you been able to write the report?"
      B: "Yes - I'm about to email it to you." ---------(This exchange was Adult to Adult)

Example 2
      A: "Would you like to skip this meeting and go watch a film with me instead?"
      B: "I'd love to - I don't want to work anymore, what should we go and see?" (Child to Child)

Example 3
   A: "You should have your room tidy by now!" (Parent to Child)
   B: "Will you stop hassling me? I'll do it eventually!" (Child to Parent)

Communication like this can continue indefinitely. (Clearly it will stop at some stage - but this psychologically balanced exchange of strokes can continue for some time).

Crossed Transactions
Communication failures are typically caused by a 'crossed transaction' where partners address ego states other than that their partner is in. Consider the above examples jumbled up a bit.

Example 1a:
   A: "Have you been able to write that report?" (Adult to Adult)
   B: "Will you stop hassling me? I'll do it eventually!" (Child to Parent)
is a crossed transaction likely to produce problems in the workplace. "A" may respond with a Parent to Child transaction. For instance:
   A: "If you don't change your attitude, you'll get fired."

Example 2a:
   A: "Is your room tidy yet?" (Parent to Child)
   B: "I'm just going to do it, actually." (Adult to Adult)
is a more positive crossed transaction. However there is the risk that "A" will feel aggrieved that "B" is acting responsibly and not playing their role, and the conversation will develop into:
   A: "I can never trust you to do things!" (Parent to Child)
   B: "Why don't you believe anything I say?" (Adult to Adult) which can
continue indefinitely.

Duplex or Covert transactions
Another class of transaction is the 'duplex' or 'covert' transactions, where the explicit social conversation occurs in parallel with an implicit psychological transaction. For instance,
   A: "I need you to stay late at the office with me." (Adult words) body
language indicates sexual intent (flirtatious Child)
   B: "Of course." (Adult response to Adult statement). winking or
grinning (Child accepts the hidden motive).

Phenomena behind the transactions

Life positions
In TA theory,"Life Position" refers to the general feeling about life (specifically, the unconscious feeling, as opposed to a conscious philosophical position) that colours every dyadic (i.e. person- to-person) transaction. Initially four such Life Positions were proposed:

1. "I'm Not OK, You're OK" (I-U+)

2. "I'm Not OK, You're Not OK" (I-U-)

3. "I'm OK, You're Not OK" (I+U-)

4. "I'm OK, You're OK" (I+U+)

However, lately, an Australian TA analyst has claimed that in order to better represent the Life Position behind disorders that were not, allegedly, as widespread and/or recognized at the time when TA was conceptualized as they are now (such as borderline personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder) the above list requires alteration. Also, two additional Life Positions are proposed:

1. "I'm not-OK, You're OK" (I-U+)

2. "I'm not-OK, You're not-OK" (I-U-)

3. "I'm not-OK, But You're Worse" (I-U--)

4. "I'm not-OK, You're Irrelevant" (I-U?)

5. "I'm a Bit More OK Than You Are" (I++U+)

6. "I'm OK, You're OK" (I+U+)

7. "I'm OK, You're Irrelevant" (I+U?)

The difference between one's own OK-ness and other's OK-ness captured by description "I'm OK, You're not-OK" is proposed to be substituted by description that more accurately captures one's own feeling (not jumping to conclusions based only on one's perceived behavior), therefore stating the difference in a new way: "I'm not-OK, but You're worse" (I-,U--), instead.

Life (or Childhood) Script

- Script is a life plan, directed to a reward.

- Script is decisional and responsive; i.e., decided upon in childhood in response to perceptions of the world and as a means of living with and making sense of the world. It is not just thrust upon a person by external forces.

- Script is reinforced by parents (or other influential figures and experiences).

- Script is for the most part outside awareness.

- Script is how we navigate and what we look for, the rest of reality is redefined (distorted) to match our filters.

Each culture, country and people in the world has a Mythos, that is, a legend explaining its origins, core beliefs and purpose. According to TA, so do individual people. A person begins writing his/her own life story (script) at a young age, as he/she tries to make sense of the world and his place within it. Although it is revised throughout life, the core story is selected and decided upon typically by age 7. As adults it passes out of awareness.

A life script might be "to be hurt many times, and suffer and make others feel bad when I die", and could result in a person indeed setting himself up for this, by adopting behaviours in childhood that produce exactly this effect. Though Berne identified several dozen common scripts, there are a practically infinite number of them. Though often largely destructive, scripts could as easily be mostly positive or beneficial.

Redefining and Discounting

- *Redefining* means the distortion of reality when we deliberately (but unconsciously) distort things to match our preferred way of seeing the world. Thus a person whose script involves "struggling alone against a cold hard world" may redefine others' kindness, concluding that others are trying to get something by manipulation.

- *Discounting* means to take something as worth less than it is. Thus to give a substitute reaction which does not originate as a here-and-now Adult attempt to solve the actual problem, or to choose not to see evidence that would contradict one's script. Types of discount can also include: passivity (doing nothing), over-adaptation, agitation, incapacitation, anger and violence.

Injunctions and Drivers
TA identifies twelve key injunctions which people commonly build into their scripts. These are injunctions in the sense of being powerful "I can't/mustn't ..." messages that embed into a child's belief and life-script:

- Don't be (don't exist)

- Don't be who you are

- Don't be a child

- Don't grow up

- Don't make it in your life

- Don't do anything!

- Don't be important

- Don't belong

- Don't be close

- Don't be well (don't be sane!)

- Don't think

- Don't feel.

  In addition there is the so-called episcript:
  "You should (or deserve to) have this happen in your life, so it doesn't have to happen to me."
  (Magical thinking on the part of the parent(s).)

Against these, a child is often told other things he or she must do. There is debate as to whether there are five or six of these 'drivers':
- Please (me/others)!
- Be perfect!
- Be Strong!
- Try Hard!
- Hurry Up!
- Be Careful! (is in dispute)

Thus in creating his script, a child will often attempt to juggle these, example: "It's okay for me to go on living (ignore *don't exist*) so long as I *try hard*".

This explains why some change is inordinately difficult. To continue the above example: When a person stops *trying hard* and relaxes to be with his family, the injunction *You don't have the right to exist* which was being suppressed by their script now becomes exposed and a vivid threat. Such an individual may feel a massive psychological pressure which he himself doesn't understand, to return to *trying hard*, in order to feel safe and justified (in a childlike way) in *existing*.

Driver behaviour is also detectable at a very small scale, for instance in instinctive responses to certain situations where driver behaviour is played out over five to twenty seconds.
Broadly speaking, scripts can fall into Tragic, Heroic or Banal (or Non-Winner) varieties, depending on their rules.

TA and popular culture
Eric Berne's ability to express the ideas of TA in common language and his popularisation of the concepts in mass-market books inspired a boom of popular TA texts, some of which simplify TA concepts to a deleterious degree.

One example is a caricature of the structural model, where it is made out that the Parent judges, the Adult thinks and the Child feels. Most serious TA texts, including those aimed at the mass market rather than professionals, avoid this degree of oversimplification.

Thomas Harris's highly successful popular work from the late 1960s, *I'm OK, You're OK* is largely based on Transactional Analysis. A fundamental divergence, however, between Harris and Berne is that Berne postulates that everyone starts life in the *"I'm OK"* position, whereas Harris believes that life starts out *"I'm not OK, you're OK"*. Many transactional analysts have regarded Harris as too far removed from core TA beliefs to be considered a transactional analyst.

New Age author James Redfield has acknowledged Harris and Berne as important influences in his best-seller The Celestine Prophecy. The protagonists in the novel survive by striving (and succeeding) in escaping from "control dramas" that resemble the games of TA.

ADDITIONAL READING OPTIONS

Books by Eric Berne (Popular)
- (1964) *Games People Play*. New York: Grove Press. ISBN 0-14-002768-8.
    - (1996) (Paperback reissue ed.) New York: Ballantine Books. ISBN 0-345-41003-3.

- (1975) *A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis (Paperback)*; 1975, Grover Press; ISBN 0-394-17833-X

- (1975) *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?* ISBN 0-552-09806-X.

Books by other authors
- Ian Stewart, Vann Joines - *TA Today: A New Introduction to Transactional Analysis*. ISBN 1870244001

- (1990) (Paperback reissue ed.) *Scripts People Live: Transactional Analysis of Life Scripts*. New York: Grove Press By Claude Steiner ISBN 0-394-49267-6.

- Reparenting, TA and ITAA. Margaret Singer, Janja Lalich *Crazy Therapies : What Are They? Do They Work?* 1996, ISBN 0-7879-0278-0

- Celebrate Your Self. Corkille Briggs, Dorothy. (1986). Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group. ISBN 0-385-13105-4

- Steiner, Claude, and JoAnn Dick (illustrator). *The Original Warm Fuzzy Tale: A Fairytale*. Sacramento: Jalmar Press, 1977. ISBN 0915190087.

- *Born to Win: Transactional Analysis with Gestalt Experiments* By Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward (Addison-Wesley, 1971)