The human species currently faces an unprecedented global crisis. Mounting scientific evidence makes it clear that our planet simply cannot much longer support us in the way that it has – certainly not in the numbers and with the level of impact that we have reached. Various groups of human have solved earlier crises similar to this, though not on the same scale, by moving – finding new land or whole new continents to exploit or by finding new apparently limitless supplies of fuel – whales, coal, gas, oil – they have all proven to be limited (Dilworth 2010). This is a crisis that we, as transactional analysts cannot ignore. The physical and psychological (conscious and unconscious) implications of this are profound. We have professional and personal social responsibilities to address.

It is because of this biopsychosocial challenge we face that I suggest Clare Grave’s theories and their development as Spiral Dynamics have a valuable contribution to make to our work both with individual clients, groups and the wider society of which we and they are embedded holons.

Whether working as a secondary school teacher, a community worker or a psychotherapist, I have always been fascinated by the interface between the individual and their social context. The personal and the political are never far apart for me. Indeed it was the social perspective of TA that drew me to it in the first place. Berne’s emphasis on the social nature of our being (strokes), the interactive quality of our psychology (transactions) and the shaping power of our early social contexts (script) was radical in its day. His egalitarian approach to sharing the psychotherapeutic understanding he had with patients also gave TA a progressive edge and implicitly challenged potentially oppressive power relations between professionals and their clients (I’m OK, You’re OK). The early TA emphasis on group therapy and the structure and dynamics of groups confirmed this social perspective.

Berne himself described TA as a social psychiatry and a social psychology. He also expanded his ego state model to hypothesise a societal and cultural “personality” with its own ego state structure which we incorporate into our Parent ego state as the character, technicalities and etiquette of the cultural group within which we are raised or within which we live and work (Berne 1963). Subsequently others have expanded the TA theory of cultural scripting (Roberts 1975), the cultural Parent (Drego 1983), the cultural Frame of Reference (James 1994) and the power dynamics that underpin such influences (Jacobs 1987).
However Robert Massey suggests that, for all that, TA is not really a social psychology. Massey (2008) argues that Berne’s social psychiatry was limited in its scope in that it confines itself to:

- *i) personality structure as primary,*  
- *ii) interpersonal transactions result from personality processes,*  
- *iii) emphasis on pathology.*

It leaves the impacts of  
- *i) interpersonal on personal underexamined,*  
- *ii) contexts/social structures out of focus (Barnes1999),*  
- *iii) positive development and resilience disregarded (Cornell 1988)*

Massey suggests that for TA to become more fully a social psychology it needs to develop a social-psychological perspective that recognises that our sense of self, other, relationships and social structures *arise from and are bound together through social-psychological processes.* Culture can thus be seen to have self, interpersonal and systemic dimensions, all of which can be examined.

I would suggest that TA has some good theoretical tools for examining the self dimensions of culture in the formation of the cultural Parent and the sense of self. (Drego, 1997) (Sills and Hargarden, 2002). We also have tools for examining the interpersonal dimension of culture in cultural scripting. It is in the systemic dimension of culture that TA is lacking in theory, analysis and practice.

It is in this area that I think the work of Clare Graves (2005) and its later development by Beck and Cowan as *Spiral Dynamics* (1996) can offer TA practitioners a framework for examining social-psychological phenomena systemically and applying that to their work. For me it offers a bridge between the inner, individual journey of psychotherapy and the social question of how we can build just, sustainable and sustaining societies that facilitate and support the individual’s healthy development.

There is a high level of compatibility between TA and Spiral Dynamics and possibilities for mutual enrichment of understanding. Eric Berne and Clare Graves were contemporaries who, as far as I know, never connected. I think they would have found each other’s ideas fascinating. Born around the same time (Berne 1910, Montreal – Graves 1914, Indiana) they both lived through and were deeply impacted by the Depression and the Second World War; both were interested in bringing about a new and better social order; both were highly independent thinkers ready to challenge received orthodoxy; both based their theories on close observation of their clients/students and both were interested in finding links between the biological, social and psychological understandings of their time.

Clare Graves, as professor of psychology at Union College Senechtady, NY, became tired of his students’ question in relation to the psychological theories he was teaching them: “But which one is RIGHT?”

Refusing to give them easy answers, he instead set up a programme of study that required his students (who also became his research subjects over many years) to offer their own definitive statement about human development by completing the statement:
“For me the mature adult personality is one who....”

They were then required to refine and test their definition over the course of their studies. From his assessment of their results and with the help of outside assessors he began to detect different “types of mind” that emerged sequentially as his students developed their thinking.

Patterns of thinking and sets of values emerged – ways of looking at the world that showed clearly identifiable bands of what we, in TA, would most closely describe as Frames of Reference. What interested Graves was that the patterns he saw emerging in his students were comparable to the patterns of human cultures and social organisation that had emerged gradually through human history.

His thesis was that the environmental and social circumstances of human kind impacted on and interacted with our intrinsic biological and neurological capacities to co-create an evolving spiral of ever greater complexity of social organisation and expanding human consciousness. The metaphor he chose for this was the double helix of the DNA. Interestingly Pam Levin in her DVD (2008) also uses the image of the double helix to convey this dynamic interaction between the individual and their context on the spiral of growth.

The one strand Graves described as the “Conditions OF existence” (Existential problems-totality of environmental forces); the other as the “Conditions FOR existence” (Existential means for living – psycho-nuerological coping systems/cognitive capacities/temperamental dispositions). Together these two strands, connecting and interacting resulted in different emerging stages of human development (Existential State of the species group or individual). He called this the Emergent Cyclical Double Helix Model of The Adult Human Biopsychosocial Systems (1981 paper, Boston) cited Beck and Cowan (1996)

Existential problems are named A-F ;Existential means are named N-S;

Existential stages emerge at the nodes where these strands meet
AN,BO,CP,DQ,ER,FS,A1N1,B1O1. The last two repeat the first two because they are seen as similar but operating at a new level.
Exhibit XII

A Double Helix Representation of the Oscillating, Spiraling Development of Adult Human Psychosocial, Existential States as the Brain Alternates Dominance by the Left Hemisphere, in Odd Numbered States, and the Right Hemisphere in Even Numbered States.

The space in the areas included within the two components which develop by alternating spurts and plateaus represent increasing degrees of conceptual space as each quantum-like movement in a later appearing psychosocial system takes place.

NOTE the size of system 7 - A'N', the first system in the second spiral of human psychological being. If drawn to proper scale, its total psychological space would be greater than the sum of the first six systems added together.

It represents the greatest change in human psychosocial space in all of human history. The leading edge of human thinking today is B'D thinking. By following the second order spiral we can, in general, forecast distant human psychosocial futures.

(Graves 2005, p187)
In terms of historic development Graves suggests an approximate time line for the emergence of each new type of mind as follows: Beck and Cowan ascribed colours to Graves stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Colour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AN 100,000 years ago</td>
<td>Beige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BO 50,000</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP 10,000</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DQ 5,000</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER 300</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS 150</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1N1 50</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1O1 30 years ago</td>
<td>Turquoise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(These time lines have been presented slightly differently by Beck and Wilber but the essence remains the same.)

He saw these stages as the unfolding of human biopsychological capacities in relation to the changing environmental conditions and vice versa. The emerging double helix resulted in existential stages of development that resulted in different types of mind, more complex social orders and more complex economic systems. Each stage includes and subsumes any earlier stage and may be returned to at any time. Moreover it must be remembered that the stages overlap and merge into each other.

No stage is seen as better than another although later stages will be more inclusive. Individually, we all grow within and through our social evolutionary history – rather as we still all grow through the biological evolutionary path of our early amphibious nature as part of our human growth processes. All the earlier stages lie along our path and are potentially accessible to us. There is no correlation between race, gender, intelligence and the various stages as they are expressed individually.

It is on this work that Beck and Cowan (1996) developed Spiral Dynamics.

They combined Graves original ideas with Dawkin’s (1976) concept of the “meme” – the social “gene” which is passed on culturally and defines the values, world view or consciousness of individuals within a social group. They describe the various stages identified by Graves in terms of a “wave-like meta-meme – a systems or ‘values meme’ (vMEME) that…. structures the thinking, values system, political forms and world views of whole civilizations” (p.32). They further substituted Graves’ rather complex codes for a colour based system for each stage or vMEME wave. I will be using their formulation.
**BEIGE**: is all about Survival and values oneness with Nature. We find people organizing in hunter/gatherer bands. (Instinctive thinking)

**PURPLE**: is all about Tradition and values loyalty to kin and ancestors. We find people organizing in tribal groups. (Magical-Animalistic thinking)

**RED**: is all about Power and values heroes and a wealthy elite. We find people organizing in empires (large or small). (Mythic thinking)

**BLUE**: is all about Authority and values hierarchies and rules. We find people organizing in centralised structures and states. (Absolutistic thinking)

**ORANGE**: is all about Rationality and values competition and enterprise. We find people organizing in multi-party states. (Multiplistic thinking)

**GREEN**: is all about Community and values co-operation and equality. We find people organizing in social democratic states. (Relativistic thinking)

**YELLOW**: is all about Integration and values freedom with responsibility. We find people organizing in partnership structures. (Integrative thinking)

**TURQUOISE**: is all about Holism and values universal connectedness. We find people organizing in whole earth networks. (Holistic thinking)

This is the latest wave to emerge and one about which we are still learning.....and who knows where we are headed? Beck and Cowan propose a CORAL but frankly say they don’t know yet what it will be.

Within these wave bands various cultures will have many variations in the way they express their type of mind – but they will have common core features across the same band.
These bands or waves of vMEMES develop sequentially, often merging into each other and overlapping. Once established, all the memes are potentially available to everyone and people may move from one wave to another depending on circumstances. For instance, I may demonstrate the Blue wave in my strict adherence to traffic regulations, Orange when I compare one psychotherapy theory against another, and Green when I join an organisation committed to bringing affordable therapy to disadvantaged social groups. Generally my life circumstances do not demand much Red or Purple or Beige of me though they do emerge when required. (Red when having to enter gang dominated areas, Purple for the FIFA World Cup, and Beige whenever I spend time in the wilderness.)

On the whole, however, it is difficult for an individual or group whose members strongly occupy a particular wave to appreciate the value of other waves. Hence the difficulty church leaders (Purple/Blue) have in finding common ground with those of their faithful who are in favour of gay marriage or women priests. (Orange/Green)

In South Africa tribal people (Purple) were often in direct conflict with the Khoi San hunter gatherers (Beige) whose way of life was so different from their own. Later British soldiers, wearing guess what colour coats (Red) and aided by the Church and colonial government structures (Blue) were fiercely destructive of the tribal peoples’ way of life. Certainly this was a conflict over land and resources but also a clash of different world views and economic and social systems.

However, Graves proposes that we are gradually developing a whole new tier of consciousness - the first point at which human society has the ability to reflect on, accept and fully integrate prior waves. This only becomes possible in the last two stages (Yellow and Turquoise):

Returning to South Africa for examples: at the time of our democratic transition in 1994 we were blessed with a significant number of leaders who were apparently moving into the Yellow wave, as indicated by their ability to respond, often with deft skill, to:

- The need for land restitution to ensure the survival of our first peoples. (Beige)
- The important role of the traditional African leaders and healers. (Purple)
- The power plays of chief Gatcha Butelezi and his Zulu empire. (Red)
- The structures and beliefs of a variety of faiths and the rule of law. (Blue)
- The enterprise and initiative of the business community and technology leaders. (Orange)
- The need to build a more equal and caring society and to protect our environment. (Green)
- The opportunity, through extensive dialogue, to integrate all these elements into our new constitution. (Yellow)

So in the First Tier (i.e. up to Green) one can see little merit in the vMemes that one is not occupying oneself at that time, regarding them as backward or sacriligeous or plain ‘wrong’.
Once one moves into Yellow and enters the Second Tier one sees and accepts all stages and vMemes as necessary and valid.

Graves also suggested that there is an oscillation from stage to stage between what he described as “sacrificing self” or “express self” systems of thought. These two approaches can be likened to Andras Angyal’s (1941) distinction between ‘homonomy’ and ‘autonomy’ – the tension between our need to belong, to be part of a “superindivudual whole (p173)” and our need to be “distinctly individualistic” (p173). In TA terms this is the need for strokes and recognition set alongside the need for autonomy.

Of course these two trends, although apparently in opposition, cannot exist alone. We cannot be apart from something unless we are or were in some sense a part of it. There is a dynamic tension between them and Graves simply suggests that certain stages emphasise one more than another. The way I like to look at this is to see Autonomy and Homonomy as two planes so that as Physis (which should be drawn as a spiral rather than an arrow- given that, in nature, so many forms exhibit a spiral growth pattern) takes us along our developmental path we circle now closer to one, now closer to the other.

Beck and Cowan suggest that this oscillation between the two planes of “sacrifice self” and “assert self” are also indicative of an outer or inner locus of control.

In what ways can this theory of the emerging spiral of human “minds” or psychosocial systems inform our TA theory and practice?

Firstly, much of TA theory is based on establishing the individual’s “autonomy”. Classically this involves the famous “divorce on friendly terms” from one’s parents. This emphasis on autonomy may simply not be appropriate within the context of a culture that falls within the “sacrifice self” plane. The person may present with an impasse between their Child needs and...
cultural Parent that they may be very reluctant to resolve because “divorce” from parents, parent figures and extended family is simply not allowed, however friendly the terms.

A man in his 30s from Zimbabwe came to see me with signs of depression and anxiety. It soon became clear that part of the problem was the conflict he was experiencing between obeying the desires of his whole family to marry him off to a rural woman from his area and his own desire to take a wife from his current social milieu and educational background. Inviting him to constellate his family in sandplay he provided the only example I have ever been given by a client of Hellinger’s ideal “order of love” pattern. (Hellinger 1998)

His father and all the male members were aligned on the right, his mother and all the women were aligned on the left. The children were aligned in order of age. What became clear as he worked was that the men and women had very circumscribed gender roles and occupied two separate worlds that were not encouraged to meet. The individual man and woman might come together but their worlds were not shared. As he looked at this picture it became clearer to him that this was not how he wanted to live. It also became clear that the world he came from would find his choice of something new difficult to come to terms with. Getting some understanding of the bigger picture of his family within their cultural context seemed to help but I don’t know how he resolved the matter as was seeing me on the basis of short term therapy.

For me the importance of this example is that the impasses he was experiencing, (both type 1 and type 2) could not be looked at as a purely internal or private matter as would be usual within a characteristically individual therapy. He would not have to deal with the backlash of a punitive internal parent, but real social isolation and stigma. Helping him to find strategies for bridging this divide and being able to hold and accept several positions on the spiral in an integrated way seemed to me to be an essential part of his therapy.

In terms of human development, the types of mind reflected in the stages of SD at a social/species level can be compared with various theories of child and adult developmental stages. (See comparative table Graves 2005 pp 440-446) It obviously bears a remarkable similarity to Pam Levin’s work in Cycles of Power in which people can be observed to spiral up or down in response to pressures to progress or regress. However, I think there are risks in seeking to equate them. Each of Grave’s nodes can be seen to describe a functionally adult mode. There are many different ways of being a mature and functional adult depending on context and culture. However, setting the two side by side gives us a much richer picture. Instead of looking at an individual’s development in a vacuum, we would look at it within the cultural context and the prevailing vMEME of his family/broader social and environmental context.

Someone functioning as a mature adult in one may, on moving to another psychosocial reality find themselves totally ill equipped to deal not only with their changed circumstances but also with the demands of a wholly new “type of mind”. It is not that one type of mind is better than another, but that one may be more suited to a situation than another. For example, people moving from a rural, tribal setting in the Eastern Cape and attempting to live and work
in the modern, urban setting of Cape Town face many physical challenges but also psychosocial adjustments.

When working with young adults from this kind of background I was asked the question:”Is it possible to become HIV positive through witchcraft?” In the rural village this question would hardly have needed asking - obviously it can. The challenge of the urban setting, sex education at school and the campaigns for testing and retroviral treatment had presented another world view. These young people were struggling to understand the two very different worlds they were straddling (Orange and Purple). Clearly the question needed to be addressed with respect and sensitivity – particularly since some of the other young people in the group (from a different racial and cultural background) clearly thought these questions were either crazy (from an Orange perspective) or blasphemous (from Blue).

Consciously addressing the question from a Yellow, second tier position, enabled me to value all their perspectives and challenge them to examine their responses while also offering my own belief system as something they could equally challenge. I told them that witchcraft was not part of my way of thinking so I couldn’t give an expert opinion on it and that I would prefer to ask more about what they thought and why. It turned out that, in addition to their early immersion in the concept of witchcraft and magic powers they had recently experienced a church service where someone came forward to be “saved”. She had then confessed her sins - the many times she had made someone HIV positive through witchcraft. The priest, rather than rejecting this information, had embraced the “sinner” as a saved soul thereby implicitly validating her powers. I then asked if they had believed the woman. Some did but some had the thought that she might be looking for attention. They were ambivalent about this but, on balance, thought she had been playing to the crowd. I was then able to suggest that examining the source of information was often useful in measuring its value and validity. I then asked if they thought there might also be some connection between sex and HIV – yes, they were open to that idea. “So”, I asked, “Can you become pregnant through witchcraft?” “Don’t be silly” they all shouted and fell about laughing. “Why not?” I persisted. They had no ready answer but gradually it emerged that mostly bad things happen by witchcraft and that witchcraft has a lot to do with exploiting or controlling our fears.

All of us were left with a lot to think about and the issue for me was whether their world view would usefully equip them for their new lives in the city and enable them to remain HIV negative or find effective treatment. Traditional healing methods have great power and I am sure can often be effective but they have singularly failed to halt the progress in Africa of this new 20th century disease quite unknown to traditional African society.

The work I did with them could be looked at in TA terms as decontamination work. Certainly I was encouraging them to question and think about received Parent beliefs and Child fears and hopes and use their Adult to test what might work for them. However, the difficulty in working in culturally diverse societies is how to differentiate between what is a contamination and what is congruent Adult reality testing of a different order. I was aware that had I been talking to a Sangoma (traditional healer) in the Eastern Cape she would have
found my thinking about witchcraft and her ability to counteract it decidedly contaminated. Nor would I, in many other respects, be equipped to live in her rural setting.

This is where I think Jacqui Schiff et al (1975) and their elucidation of the frame of reference are useful. I suggested earlier that Graves’ “types of mind” could be likened to frames of reference - the frame of reference being the individual form of the biopsychosocial spiral or vMEME wave.

An individual’s frame of reference is the structure of associated (conditioned) responses (neural pathways) which integrates the various ego states in response to specific stimuli. It provides the ...overall perceptual, conceptual, affective, and action set which is used to define the self, other people, and the world, both structurally and dynamically p.50

They suggest that the frame of reference is established by the Parent in its defining function and that it can be likened to a “skin” that surrounds the ego states and acts as a “filter” through which the person experiences reality. Since reality is defined largely by consensus the person may experience their frame of reference as congruent or incongruent with the consensus around them and or with their natural Child needs. If it is incongruent then change is likely to happen.

Changes in the frame of reference result from (1) the Child becoming uncomfortable with the present frame of reference and seeking Adult information and new permissions, (2) the Child becoming uncomfortable with the present frame of reference and seeking new permissions, or (3) a Parent (external) structure “imposing” a new frame of reference. In all cases, frame of reference change is only complete when the new definitions are integrated into all three ego states as Parent-OK, Adult-factual, and Child- problem-solving. (Schiff p.51)

I think (1) above is what was happening with the young people in my group. On the other hand what has happened in our schools since 1996 with the abolition of corporal punishment is (3) above. There are still many people who have not integrated this new parental requirement laid down by law. This is one of the many examples where our constitution (Orange/Green/Yellow) does not match the frame of reference of much of the population (Purple/Red/Blue).

Another way of looking at this would be in terms of the Cultural Parent as detailed by Pearl Drego (1996). In her article she develops this original concept to investigate the “character” of the cultural Parent. She sees this as not only being held in the Parent but as being internalised in P1 in the Child. She sees this as the shadow of the Culture. This “shadow” is what carries the injunctions that become internalised as part of the character of the culture. She works with permissions that allow people to dispel the injunctions. I submit that this internalised “character” of the culture in the child is not only the shadow or set of injunctions but also the repository of permissions from that culture and its general feel, flavour and touch. Unless the new permissions offered take root there they will be ineffective.
A young man came for therapy – very depressed and lonely. As a child from a relatively poor and uneducated household in a marginalised mixed race group (designated ‘coloured’ in the apartheid era) he had been “adopted” by various teachers because of his obvious intelligence. As a result he had been the first in his family to become university educated and now had an academic position. He had, along the way, had several white middle class mentors. In the process he had acquired a whole new Cultural Parent, at least as far as the etiquette and technicalities were concerned. However, he often felt himself to be “out of his depth” and floundering in his new context. He simply wasn’t at home in the character – it had all come to him too late and didn’t feel familiar. He equally no longer felt at home in his family setting because their values and approach to life was too different from his own. His sense of alienation and loneliness was profound. In Spiral Dynamic terms one could think of his Adult and Parent (new) being at home in the Orange/Green band while his Child was still very much more familiar with the Red/Blue context of his early childhood on the Cape Flats. He was deeply envious and admiring of his mentor’s children who were effortlessly absorbing the experiences he had lacked.

Part of the work he needed to do was to allow his Child to “coat-tail” on the experiences of his mentor’s children, while also validating those aspects of the parenting he received as a child that had held him in good stead and provided a loving bond of a different character. From an SD perspective he needed to learn to move into a more yellow band where he could value both, see the limits of both and take permission to be more of a “chameleon” which is one of the characteristics of the yellow band (Wilber 2010 in video interview, Integral Life web site.) In that way he could experiment with allowing himself to be more like his family and siblings when with them, thus entering into their world. In this way they accepted him more and he felt a greater sense of belonging. He began to feel more comfortable, consciously moving between these two worlds, rather than feeling split or torn. In the process what had been experienced as a “Don’t belong” injunction gave way to permission to belong in a variety of contexts.

In terms of pathology and health, individual and social, each of the Spiral Dynamics nodes (vMEMES) can be seen to have both positive and negative features (a shadow side) but more importantly, they can be seen to be maladaptive or functional for the individual or the group depending on their life circumstances and environmental context. This raises the risk of us being lost in complete relativism. Graves did not think so, and neither do I. While he asserted the value of each band he was in favour of people expanding their options. The second tier offers people expanded options in which they can choose to understand, enter into, accommodate, or utilise any of the previous bands.

What I am saying is that when one form of being is more congruent with the realities of existence than some other form, then it is the better form of living for those realities......I do suggest, however, and this I deeply believe is so, that for the overall welfare of total man’s existence in this world, over the long run of time, higher levels are better than lower levels and that the prime good of any society’s governing figures should be to promote human movement up the levels of human existence. (Graves p...)
From the point of view of a TA practitioner, it seems to me that Spiral Dynamics offers a number of challenges to TA’s own frame of reference. Autonomy is the avowed goal of TA therapy but how would we understand autonomy within the context of a social system and pattern of thinking that values homonomy more highly. The implications of this are profound and go well beyond the usual notions of diversity and cultural “awareness” which can often seem to be something of an “add on” to TA theory. The challenge of Spiral Dynamics is to acknowledge much deeper layers of difference than we usually allow for. This should not, however, blind us to the even more profound human similarities. Berne’s basic psychological hungers remain the same for us all. As humans we all form groups and we all think in metaphor – we give meaning to all our experiences and those meanings in turn shape our experiences. Spiral Dynamics makes it clear, however, that the nature of those groups, the meanings we make and structure of our thinking patterns may vary greatly depending on context.

This takes us beyond the definition of script, even cultural script. It is closer to what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as everyday rather than literary metaphor. They maintain that our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. (p3). They offer many examples of phrases that reveal how deeply our whole conceptual system is based on metaphor. Concepts of time, for instance, vary greatly and are revealed in the words we use. Within industrial society time is viewed as precious and limited - we “waste” it, “use” it, “spend” it, “give” it, “borrow” or “lose” it. In Africa (and other traditional rural societies) time is experienced altogether differently. (Hutnik 2002) There is an expression in Africa that says “God gave the white man a watch but he gave the black man time”. Spiral Dynamics recognises those metaphors and their conceptual constructs at each stage of the spiral and may help to challenge the TA practitioner to listen more closely for those patterns of thought and to search for the deeper layers of biopsychosocial adaptation. They will also become more aware of their own everyday metaphors that may limit their ability to fully hear their client or adequately convey what they wish to say.

In this sense Spiral Dynamics, although having something in common with cultural script should not be seen as the same thing. Social groups sharing the same basic spiral view would still have different cultural “shades” to that colour and possibly different injunctions and Drivers. For example, English and Afrikaans business communities in white South Africa would have a similar Orange outlook but a quite different cultural feel and different cultural scripting. Equally, more fundamentalist positions of various faiths would have a Blue absolutist outlook in common (though unable to acknowledge that insisting on their own particular “truth”) but they would have potentially different cultural scripts.

The same might be said of the TA global community. We might share a common TA Script but have different spiral perspectives depending on our contexts. As a historically evolving theory and practice, TA had its origins in USA of the 1950s. It uses terms that reveal its origins and its underlying metaphors and values. Autonomy is defined as the highest goal and seen in terms of a friendly divorce from parents; scripts (in itself a modern theatre or movie term) are seen in terms of winners and losers; I’m OK, you’re OK assumes an egalitarian
perspective on human value. All of these reveal the Orange moving to Green roots of TA. For those of us working with communities who do not share that frame of reference, this is a challenge. I know my Indian colleagues have wrestled with these questions too and developed their own perspectives, sometimes finding themselves at variance with their European/USA colleagues.

Of course, TA has also been changing over the years, moving along the spiral itself. The Integrative, Co-constructive and Relational approaches are Green moving to Yellow. Some people have seen this as a severe challenge to the more Orange/Green origins of TA, others have welcomed it. In this sense some of the arguments about “theory” can be seen not so much to do with content as to do with the spiral frame of reference/perspective of the protagonists. It seems to me that the more fully TA practitioners, both individually and as a community can move clearly into the Yellow band with its fuller perspective and greater tolerance of difference, the more we will be able to work adaptively, respectfully and effectively with clients and colleagues who are dealing with different parts of the spiral.

The good news is that, if Graves is right, the journey is not over. He called our human development the never ending quest. So TA and the TA community will hopefully go on to develop greater levels of complexity, wider perspectives and deeper integration. So too will the wider community in which we are active.

This brings me back to my starting point – given the biopsychosocial crisis we face, Graves’ biopsychosocial theory might be particularly relevant. We now know about the amazing plasticity of the human brain which continues to form, in terms both of its actual structure and its neural complexity, well beyond our birth – particularly in the early years and adolescence. It follows that the environments we put in place and the cultural supports we offer for full development are crucial. We also know that memes tend to replicate themselves regardless and Cultural Parent often persists beyond its usefulness, leading to the stagnation or collapse of social systems (Diamond 2005). It therefore becomes vital to discover how we can foster individual and social change when required, or manage it when it is forced upon us by circumstances. How will we manage our spiral? Up or down?

The Spiral, say Beck and Cowan, remains healthy when avenues are open for movement on towards the more complex bands of thinking. Forced blockages cause the spiral to stagnate or even implode and regress. (1996, p13)

Thirty years ago Clare Graves, warning of some of these blockages, nonetheless sounded an optimistic note in relation to what he called “second tier” thinking: The present moment finds our society attempting the most difficult, but at the same time most exciting, transition the human race has faced to date. It is not merely a transition to a new level of existence but the start of a new ‘movement’ in the symphony of human history.
REFERENCES


