TCS Glossary

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 30 July, 2003 - 11:52

What follows is a *glossary*, not TCS theory, not an explanation or argument, merely what we mean by certain words *in this context*. It should not be concluded from these definitions that we reject existing definitions. We do not. These are additional meanings, not replacements for any of the pre-existing dictionary definitions.

A general comment about the terminology of TCS

We tend to use certain words in a more general sense than is conventional. This is inevitable when we are extending and unifying concepts, but sometimes leads to misunderstandings. For instance, when we say "education", we do *not* mean what most people mean, namely the process of forcing people to memorise some predetermined information or acquire some standardised skill or behaviour. According to *that* definition, you "educate" paper when you print the telephone directory on it. We believe that this is not a concept of education that it is appropriate to apply to human beings. Our human-centred concepts of education and learning are actually very simple, yet can be quite a mouthful to pin down in a definition:

Education and Learning

Education (or learning) is a process by which people come to understand what they want to understand, solve problems that they have encountered, grow in directions that seem good to them, increase or exercise their creativity, and generally improve their minds (by their own lights) not only in intellectual ways but also their personalities, relationships, values and aims, etc.

Problem

A **problem** is something that gives rise to thought. Human beings think when they want to go from one state of mind to a preferable state of mind (preferable to them, that is). Hence a problem is a situation in which a person wants to improve his state of mind.

Note: Some problems are unpleasant, others are pleasant. Understanding the difference (see **Coercion**) is one of the keys to TCS philosophy.

All problems in human minds are conflicts between theories.

Problem solving: One solves a problem when one succeeds in finding a preferable state of mind.

Theory

A **theory** is any of the following: aspect of personality, assumption, behavioural tendency, belief, concept, conception, conjecture, conviction, deduction, desire, disposition, ethical maxim, expectation, explanation, fear, gene, guess, habit, hope, hypothesis, idea, impression, impulse, inspiration, mental image, **meme**, mental picture, meta-theory, notion, opinion, postulate, predisposition, premise, presumption, presupposition, psychological characteristic, psychological tendency, rationale, sensation, skill, speculation, state of mind, supposition, surmise, suspicion, theory, thought, trait, wish, etc. **Conscious theories** are part of the conscious mind, **unconscious theories** are part of the unconscious mind. **Explicit theories** are expressed in a language such as English, or mathematical notation; **inexplicit theories** are expressed in the brain's internal code. **Inborn theories** are inherited in our DNA. (That does not make them immutable, because the brain's theories can take over the functions of inherited theories – as when a person decides to starve as a political protest, or to become celibate for moral reasons, and so on.)

Conflicting theories: Two theories within a mind may logically conflict with each other. If the person never notices any effects of this conflict, then it is psychologically insignificant. If the person (consciously or unconsciously) notices the effects, it constitutes a problem. If conflicting theories cause a mind simultaneously to act, or attempt to act, in incompatible ways, it is being **coerced** (see below).

Knowledge

Merely being true is not enough to qualify an idea or piece of information as "knowledge". A table of true statements such as:

238239587346 + 348439857639 = 586679444985. The word "green" has five letters.

may contain an arbitrarily large amount of true information while not being something that anyone would, or should, ever want to know. There can be no closed definition for what sort of information constitutes knowledge, but roughly speaking:

- Knowledge is information that *can solve problems*
- Knowledge is information that is *useful.*
- Knowledge is *explanatory* rather than merely tabulated information.
- A theory contains more knowledge if it expresses information more simply.

Reason

Not to be confused with **reasoning** (verbal proof or argument),

reason (with the corresponding adjective **rational**) is the general term for processes that tend to create knowledge. **Rational** processes are

- Open to criticism
- Truth-seeking

Reason is to be contrasted with other types of decision-making such as force, deference to authority, superstition, or faulty reasoning. Where two or more rational agents are interacting, rational processes are those that seek common preferences.

Creativity

Creativity is the ability to solve problems that are worth solving. It is the ability to create **knowledge**. Creativity is subject-specific: it is the meta-knowledge of how to solve a specific class of problems. So there is no such thing as 'raw', undifferentiated creativity.

Common preference

A **common preference** is a solution to a problem, or resolution of a disagreement, that all parties prefer to their *prima facie* positions, and to all other candidate solutions they can think of. It is the solution that pleases everyone involved in the disagreement.

Criticism

Criticising sometimes means fault-finding, belittling, humiliating, and other negative things. When we extol the virtues of **criticism**, it is not that negative sense of the word we have in mind, but philosophical criticism – arguments which address a theory, which suggest that the theory is problematic.

Entrenched

Entrenched ideas are ideas that you are unable to abandon even when they fail to survive rational criticism in your mind.

An entrenched habit is something that you *can't stop* doing even if you consciously decide to, or which makes you *feel bad* when you consciously force yourself to stop doing it.

Coercion

Our definition of **coercion** makes precise the idea of being compelled to act against one's own will:

By "**coercion**" we mean:

1. the psychological state of enacting one idea or impulse while a conflicting impulse is still active in one's mind.

This leads to some subsidiary meanings:

2. the action of intentionally or recklessly placing someone in a state of enacting one theory while a rival theory is still active in the person's mind;

3. behaviour that is intended, or likely, to do this.

Coerce:

- Intentionally or recklessly to place someone in a state of **coercion (1)**; or
- to behave in a way that is intended, or likely, to do this.

Coercive:

- likely to place someone in a state of enacting one **theory** while a rival theory is still active in his or her mind.

It all hinges on the first definition, labelled (**1**). If coercion in that sense occurs for any reason, it is harmful. The others are either harmful or risk harm, depending on whether coercion in sense (1) actually happens or is merely risked. (The question of *why* it is harmful is another matter. Here, I just want to familiarise you with the way we use the words.)

The problem is that if one engages in behaviour intended to or likely to cause (1),

that is risking harming the person. One cannot tell in advance that any particular action will definitely cause coercion (1), and indeed, coercion (1) can exist without outward signs of distress, so one cannot reliably know that a person is not in a state of coercion (1). What one can do, therefore, is to think about what actions might be likely to cause coercion (1). Therefore, what we do is to try to point out actions and behaviours which seem risky in this respect.

Having said all that, behaviours which are intended or likely to cause children to enact one theory while a rival theory is still active in their mind, very often succeed. That is why we argue strongly against many of the methods commonly used in conventional parenting.

In any particular case, a child might have the creativity not to get into the psychological state of enacting one theory while a rival theory is still active in his mind, and thereby avoid harm, but the point is, if we are engaging in coercion (3),

the child may well not be able to avoid coercion (1) so it behoves us to try not to behave in ways likely to cause coercion (1).

Consent/Non-coercion

By **consent** we mean full, free, genuine agreement, or unanimous consent. A consent-based (or "non-coercive") solution to a problem (which we call a "common preference") is one that all involved parties actively *prefer*, not one that they merely reluctantly agree to. This can be contrasted with compromise.

Unanimous consent is the criterion of decision-making in TCS relationships. Wherever there is a disagreement, the parties jointly create a **common preference**.

Self-sacrifice

Self-sacrifice is coercive. Most obviously, it is a form of *self*-coercion, because when you self-sacrifice, you are, by definition, acting against your own will. But there is more to it than that. Self-sacrifice coerces the child too. When a parent self-sacrifices, unless it is an unusual situation and the parent is feeling good (well, heroic, say) about doing so, she will probably be feeling some level of psychological pain and thus on some level resentment towards the child. This will be conveying to the child the fact that she is self-sacrificing, and because the child cares about her and wants her to be happy, this will cause the child herself an intractable (coercive) conflict.

Meme

Memes are ideas which are replicators. In other words, any idea (or theory, or attitude, or skill etc.) which is passed from one person to another through behaviour (i.e. not by genes) is a meme. You might think of it as the psychological analogue of a gene.

Whether something is a meme or not depends on how it is transmitted, not on its content per se. So, for example, shyness or fear of making a fool of oneself are not, in general, memes because they suggest coercion-induced irrationality rather

than ideas which might be replicators. The coercive parenting ideas that led to the shyness or fear of making a fool of oneself might well be replicators though. And if that fear plays a role in causing the parents to hold those ideas and coerce their children in a way that makes them acquire the same fear, then the fear itself is part of the meme.

Whenever parents behave in ways that cause their children to grow up behaving in ways that cause *their* children to grow up to cause the very same behaviour in *their* children ... a meme is operating.

For a better idea of what is meant by "meme" read ***The Extended Phenotype (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0192880519/takingchildrseri/104-6517082-9334356)*** or ***The Selfish Gene (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0192860925/takingchildrseri/104-6517082-9334356)*** by Richard Dawkins, who coined the term.

Morality

Morality is, among other things, an emergent property, a high-level summary of complex low-level facts about how to get what one wants.

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