

## PART VII

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# THE SOCIAL ORDER

According to PCT, the key to health, physical and mental, is to insure the individual of sufficient degrees of freedom for controlling perceptions. Without sufficient degrees of freedom, external and internal conflicts waste energy and leave perceptions deficiently controlled.

When we come together to seek help from one another, we also obstruct one another. Frustrated, we hunt for new ways to control our perceptions. We hunt, that is, for increased degrees of freedom. And naturally, we ask others to help us free ourselves from the frustrations we encounter in dealing with others. In our overpopulated, overurbanized, and overorganized world, almost all of us at one time or another implore parents, teachers, priests, police, lawyers, accountants, physicians, psychologists, politicians, generals, or kings to rescue us from the hindrances, constraints, and oppressions from which we suffer. We beg them to enlarge our degrees of freedom.

For almost everyone everywhere, the environment is much more social than material. Very few self-sufficient hunting-and-gathering families can still be found, and certainly no self-sufficient person singly. The rest of us depend on a few of us to bring food, clothing, and shelter to the rest of us. Most of us spend our working days providing services of one kind or another to those who provide us with food, clothing, and shelter—or to still others who provide services to them. Those in farming occupations in the United States, for example, are down to less than three percent of the population.

Daniel Eisenberg (2002) reported in *TIME* magazine some trends in the numbers of people engaged in various occupations. Included in the 16 occupations that are projected to draw the greatest increases in numbers between the years 2000 and 2010 are these services: teachers, nurses, accountants,

health therapists, police, social workers, lawyers, and recreation workers. In contrast, the occupation that will *lose* the most members during those years is that of farmers and ranchers!

Only a tiny percentage of us, in brief, devote our working hours to acquiring directly or to producing for others the necessities of life: food, clothing, and shelter. The rest of us spend most of our time helping one another disentangle ourselves from the stresses of overcrowding. Yet our most widely believed theories of human functioning urge us to decrease our degrees of freedom still further by rewarding, punishing, threatening, and acquiring the comforts of life by denying them to others—that is, by organizing ourselves competitively. As we continue to treat one another as nonliving things, as our capabilities for coercing (and killing) one another accelerate, and as our population grows ever more dense, we can only expect our ability to avoid conflict and control perception to worsen.

When I began this book, I thought the part on groups and organizations would require almost half of it, since there are uncountable settings for social life, offering unendingly various opportunities for control of perception and profusely various interactions between person and environment. After all, I had studied social psychology for about 40 years, and my head (not to speak of my filing cabinet) was full of illustrations of PCT to be found in the doings of groups and organizations.

I came to realize more clearly, as I went along, that I was not writing this book to recite the multifarious actions that people take in social settings, nor the probability of encountering action of type P along with action of type Q. When I describe here a pattern of social action, my purpose is to illustrate—to describe a manifestation of control, not to catalog social behavior. A few illustrations are enough. You can find an unending supply of further illustrations just

by looking around you. Ask yourself, for example, “What sort of perceived variable(s) might I be controlling in doing what I am doing at this moment?” Much of the time when you might ask yourself that question, you will find yourself making use of other people to control the variable(s), as in Figure 28–5.

In this part of the book, I will illustrate the points that (1) social life must inevitably be fraught with conflict, (2) there is now far more conflict than is necessary, (3) ways of organizing human life have been worked out that produce far less conflict than we now suffer, (4) no matter what the social setting, communication is generated within an individual and has its effect within an individual—or within many individuals, (5) employees have their own goals that may not coincide with managers’ goals, and conflicts therefore arise, (6) it is not necessary, for good work to get done, that all the members of the organization cleave to the so-called organizational goals—to be “aligned,” (7) there can be no end to the ways that writers (whether psychologists, sociologists, psychotherapists, historians, novelists, dramatists, poets, or any other sort of commentator you can name), define, categorize, and classify the visible patterns of social behavior, and (8) it need be no wonder that social life is endlessly fascinating to almost everyone.

I will illustrate those points without any pretense of representing fairly the vast literature on the varieties of social behavior. In any case, the idea of representing the literature fairly is irrelevant here. Writers are free to portray human behavior as they wish, and I am free to select the portrayals that I judge will suit my purpose—as long as I do not claim my selection to be representative, which I do not.

Here again are what I believe to be the fundamental postulates of PCT, phrased now in regard to perceptions in social life.

- 1 Every person acts continuously to control each of a repertoire of perceived variables. The internal standards (reference signals) for the variables specify *purpose*.
  - 2 To accomplish control, the person acts on aspects of the environment (that is, variables perceptible there), including aspects of the behavior of other persons.
  - 3 Control of a perceived variable is achieved opportunistically. The person maintains a variable (for example, internal body temperature or progress toward a goal) by using whatever means are at hand. When several means are available, the choice is influenced by the effects on other variables. See the Requisites for a Particular Act.
  - 4 The person controls many perceptions (variables) simultaneously. If the person’s controlled perceptions exceed the number of environmental opportunities (degrees of freedom) for means of control, internal conflict will occur. Effectiveness of control will then decline while total effort increases. In an environment being used by several persons, conflict among persons (in addition to internal conflict) will occur when the total variables being controlled by all of them exceed the opportunities in the environment.
  - 5 The person’s perceptions are organized in a hierarchical manner in which perceptions at “higher levels” encompass and “define” the perceptions that will be controlled as means at the “lower levels.”
- People will use the perceptual hierarchy and the social environment to increase the dependability of environmental opportunities—for example, they might replace hunting with herding. They will form promissory or obligating relationships such as rules, norms, customs, duties, roles, joint plans, and cooperation. Those relationships and categories, put into sufficiently complex combinations, become principles and system-concepts such as morality, patriotism, marriage, government, and all sorts of institutions and organizations. These social “structures” increase the degrees of freedom for some and decrease them for others. This consequence leads to political theory as well as to resentment, riot, rapacity, and revolution. In Chapter 9, I told you what Kent McClelland had to say about that.
- There are thousands of books about groups and organizations. You can, however, count almost on one hand the studies that offer a workable model of what must necessarily happen in a collectivity of purposeful humans; the only such studies I have found are those by Bourbon (1989, 1990), McClelland (1994, 1994a, 1996), McPhail and Wohlstein (1986), McPhail (1991), McPhail, Powers, and Tucker (1992), Tucker, Schweingruber, and McPhail (1999), and McPhail (2000). I used the study by McPhail, Powers, and Tucker (1992) in Chapter 9 for the section on “The Crowd” and the study by McClelland (1996) in Chapter 9 under “Collective Control of Perceptions.”
- The writings containing the key idea for Part VII are those of William Powers (1979 and 1992). The key idea is “degrees of freedom.”