

Preface

or

What you can expect of this book

This book offers a theory of human functioning. The theory does not claim to predict the acts humans will produce, or be induced to produce, or be prevented from producing—though that topic will come up. Rather, the theory will explain how humans function regardless of the acts they choose—how acts serve the functioning. The book will also tell how we can stop demanding impossible behavior from humans, ourselves and others, and thereby free ourselves of the costs of many sorts of conflict.

Unlike authors of many popular books claiming to offer psychological knowledge, I will not tell you how to win friends and influence people. In fact, I will advise you to avoid trying to do that. And I will tell you that you can sometimes be influential without trying. I will certainly not tell you how to outwit others or bend them (or break them) to your will.

Unlike authors of most texts in psychology, I will not drag you through the traditional topics that label courses and resound in the lecture halls of universities—though I will say some things about some of those topics as I go along. And I will not try to display for you in any systematic way the multifarious shapes and guises of human behavior, either in the popular manner or the academic; I leave that task to historians, cultural anthropologists, novelists, and other chroniclers.

I will not indoctrinate you with the conceptions, theories, and passwords that will get you into graduate school. I spent three years in graduate school and then about 30 years unlearning most of what I had learned there. The three years were difficult, and the 30 years were even more difficult. I would not want you to go through all that.

Though this book is not academic in the usual sense of repeating what most academic psychologists have believed during the past several decades, I do claim it to be scientific in the sense that a good many of the claims I make about human functioning can be put to experimental test—can be tried out in tangible, physically demonstrable ways that can be reproduced or extended by anyone who takes the trouble. The theory I offer here is Perceptual Control Theory, or PCT for short. Its core postulates have indeed been tested, the results of the tests have been published in the scientific literature, and the core assumptions are being extended in the designs of further experimental tests. Furthermore, the experimental tests have been far more demanding than the experimentation in the mainstream psychology books, as you will see. I am not saying that *everything* I say here has been tested empirically, but I do make that claim about the fundamental postulates and about a good many derivations from them.

I will disagree in serious ways with most of the widely accepted psychological theories you encounter in popular literature, in textbooks (of whatever discipline), and in the halls of academe. I will agree with the other theories at some points, but the underlying assumptions of the theory here (Perceptual Control Theory) are not those you will find either printed or implied on many of the pages printed about psychology. In that sense, this book is disputatious. I do not, by the way, claim that those other authors and lecturers are immoral or mentally deficient. I claim only that they are wrong.

This book is about what life is like for humans—how we function, what we can and cannot do with our brains and bodies, when we are happy and unhappy, and the like. It is not only about what human life is now and has been like, but also about what it *can* be like—about what I *want* it to be like.

As I have said, the book is not bound by the customary topics and rituals of academic psychology. It has, however, other limitations. Despite my efforts to keep my assertions close to the logic of the theory, some of what I say will inevitably be tainted by my various insularities. My education, for example, has been mostly modern. I am unable to quote extempore from Lao-tzu (6th century B.C.), Confucius (551–479 B.C.), Socrates (470?–399 B.C.), or Mencius (4th century B.C.), not to speak of Democritus (460?–370? B.C.) or Aristotle (384–322 B.C.). My professional training and work have been largely in the field of social psychology, although I did not enter graduate school until the age of 34 and therefore have the benefit of some other occupations in my earlier years. Further, though I have been poor and in one period suffered some debilitating pangs of hunger, most of my life has been, economically, one of white, middle-class comfort. I am thoroughly North American, and speak only English. I lived in Central America for some years, but I have visited Asia (Japan) only for three weeks, and I have never traveled to Europe. I have no children of my own flesh, but I have known the deep satisfactions and glories of mutual love with two wives and the terrors and grief during the long dying of one.

Some conditions of my life were given me at birth. I chose the profession of psychologist, however, after I had some experience of adult life. I learned some things about social psychology from Calmer Batalden, a colleague and friend in the Panama Canal Zone, and in the summer of 1948 I attended summer school at the University of Nebraska, where I was fortunate that the book by Krech and Crutchfield (1948) came

into my hands. I went back to the high school in the Canal Zone where I was a department head, opened the book to the how-to-do-it section, and did what the book said to do. The results were remarkable. It was that experience, and similar experiences in later years, that gave me a commitment to a psychological view of work and daily life. After my graduate studies at the University of Michigan, however, I found that I had to shake off the academic attitude toward the study of psychology if I was to make use of the useful parts of what I had learned. I am grateful to my colleague and friend Richard A. Schmuck for showing me some of the ways I could do that. I found, too, as I read further works in psychology, that the books that deviated from the established academic patterns were the books that gave me the most help. Indeed, the 1973 book by William T. Powers enabled me to make sense of all my previous discontent about psychological study. The Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) originated by Powers serves as the backbone for this book. Well, as more than that, actually. You'll see.

THANKS

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