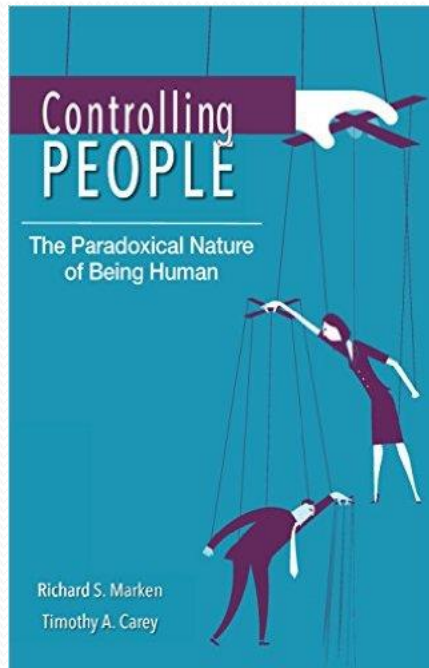


# Controlling People

The Paradoxical Nature of Being Human

A “Book Talk” by Richard S. Marken

# Controlling People



- What is this book about?
  - ✓ People who are “controlling”?
  - ✓ How to control people?
  - ✓ It’s about both because both are aspects of Human Nature.

# The Nature of Human Nature



- It is Human Nature to be controlling.
  - ✓ We are all controlling people.
  - ✓ We want to be in control of our lives.
- Among the things in our lives that we want to control are other people.
- So it also Human Nature to want to control other people.

# The Paradox



- We lose control when we try to control what we shouldn't control – which is often other people.
- But our controlling nature makes it hard to resist.
- So our controlling nature places us in a paradoxical position:
  - ✓ *Our natural inclination to be in control can cause us to lose control.*
- This has important implications for our mental health.

# Mental Health

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.

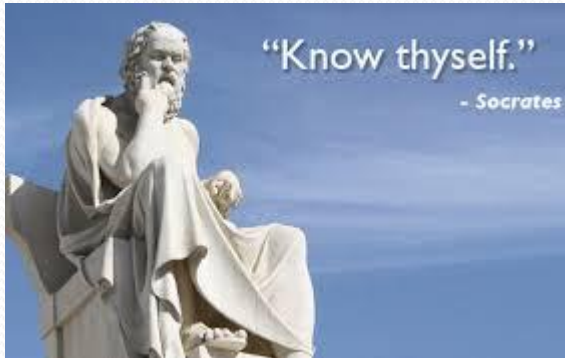
W. Shakespeare, *Othello*, Act V, Scene 2

- A mentally healthy person is one who is “in control” of her life.
  - ✓ People seeking psychological help often describe feeling like their life is “out of control”.
- Our paradoxical controlling nature is responsible for *most* of our mental health problems.
  - ✓ Our lives get “out of control” when we control in a way that leads us to lose control.
  - ✓ We are, indeed, the main cause of our own problems.
- Mental health is achieved by learning to live successfully within our controlling nature.

# Science and Self-Improvement

- “Controlling People” is a portmanteau book
  - ✓ To paraphrase Humpty Dumpty: You see, it's like a portmanteau—two books packed up into one.
  - ✓ One book is pop science
    - Control theory psychology
  - ✓ The other is pop psych
    - Better living through psychology
- We (the authors) both believe that you have to know the science in order to get the self-improvement

# Self-Improvement through Self-Knowledge



- Knowing thyself is understanding what it means to be a controlling person.
  - ✓ That's the science part
- Improving thyself is knowing how to deal with the problems we create for ourselves because of our controlling natures.
  - ✓ That's the self-improvement part

# Speaking of Knowing Things, What Do We Know?

- I am a research psychologist
  - ✓ I know a lot about the science of control as applied to living organisms.
  - ✓ And a little about using that science to improve oneself
- Tim Carey is a clinical psychologist
  - ✓ He knows a lot about using control science to help others improve themselves
  - ✓ And a lot about control science too.
- But the book was my idea.
- I asked Tim to be co-author because I wanted his clinical expertise (and his understanding of control science) to help me bundle it up properly into the portmanteau I envisioned.

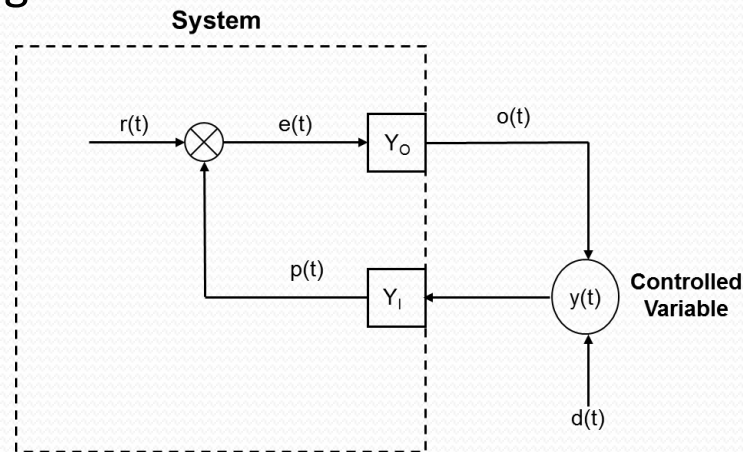


# Controlling

- The first step in understanding yourself as a controlling person is to know what controlling is.
- Formal definition:
  - ✓ Process of producing pre-selected results in a disturbance prone world.
- Informal definition:
  - ✓ Purposeful behavior
- So you are controlling whenever you are producing – or trying to produce – results on purpose.
- And doing it in the context of varying circumstances (disturbances):
  - ✓ Lifting a book
  - ✓ Riding a bike
  - ✓ Driving a car
  - ✓ Maintaining a relationship

# Controlling Explained

- Perceptual Control Theory (PCT)
  - ✓ Developed by William T. Powers and first described in his classic monograph *Behavior: The control of perception*.
  - ✓ Engineering control theory applied to the behavior of living (rather than artificial) control systems
- The diagrams and mathematics of the theory can be quite intimidating



- There are no diagrams in *Controlling People*
- We give a verbal explanation of PCT that we hope can be understood by people who, like me, are not particularly adept at advanced mathematics.

# Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) in a Nutshell

- Controlling is a closed-loop negative feedback process.
- This loop acts to keep a perceptual representation of an intended result matching a reference specification for that result.
- Reference specifications for perceptions exist as neural signals in your brain.
- The reference specification is equivalent to the temperature setting of a home thermostat.
  - ✓ The reference specification for the thermostat is set by the user of the thermostat
  - ✓ The reference specifications in the brain are set by the organism itself.

# This is Your Brain on PCT

- Conventional psychology views the brain as a computer-like device that transforms perception into action.
  - ✓ Perception controls behavior.
  - ✓ What you do and think depends on what happens to you.
- PCT views the brain as a provider of specifications for what you should be experiencing
  - ✓ Behavior is the control of perception
  - ✓ What you do depends on what you have to do to get your experience “up to spec”.
- PCT explains why it can look like perception controls behavior
- **Demonstration**
  - ✓ Can I get a volunteer for a simple finger tracking demonstration?
  - ✓ To demonstrate control of perception, apparent control by perception and autonomous “undoing” of control

# Where Do All the Reference Specifications Come From?

- Your brain is made up of a hierarchy of control systems
- Higher level control systems set the reference specifications for lower level control systems as the means of controlling their own perceptions.
- **Demonstration**
  - ✓ Can I get a volunteer for demonstration of hierarchical control

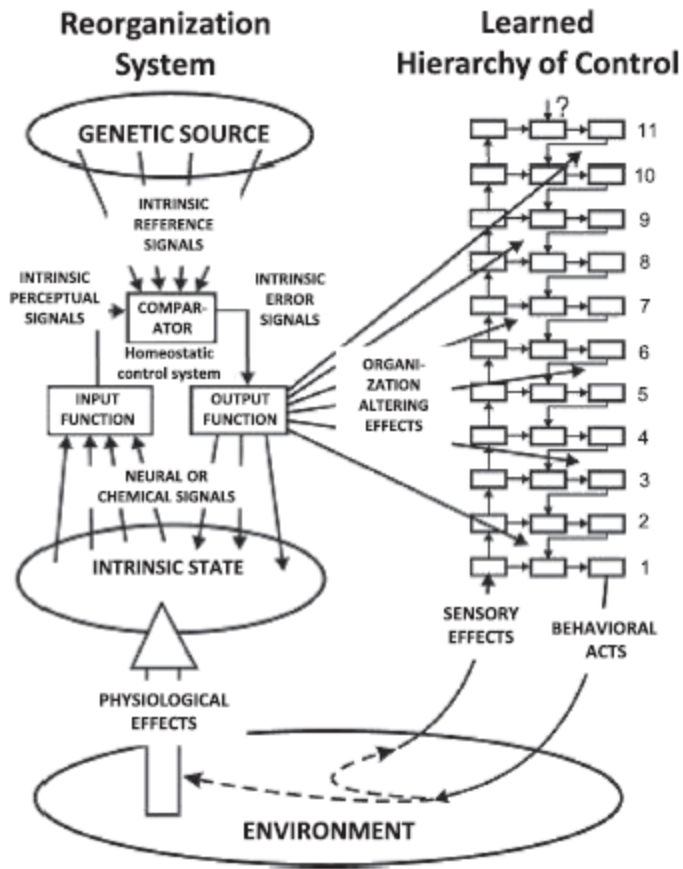
## Paradox Solved

- Hierarchical control explains the paradox of controlling people – why our controlling can lead to the loss of control.
- It happens when two higher level systems try to bring the same lower level perception to two different reference states at the same time.
- **Demonstration**
  - ✓ Can I get a volunteer for demonstration

# Conflict

- Two flavors of conflict:
  - ✓ Intrapersonal – when the control systems in conflict are in the same person
  - ✓ Interpersonal – when the control systems in conflict are in two different people
- Conflict is almost inevitable when many control systems are controlling at the same time in the same environment.
  - ✓ Conflict causes loss of the ability to control conflicted perception.
  - ✓ In demo conflict caused brief loss of control of finger position.
- Persistent conflict results in build up of “error” in higher level systems that are in conflict.
  - ✓ Experienced as stress, anxiety, depression

# Solving Conflict



- True conflict cannot be “solved” through cleverness, like the way you solve a math problem (once you know how to do math)
- Solution to conflict results from changing the way the higher level control systems do their controlling.
- This changing is done by the “reorganizing” system
  - ✓ Goes to work when control systems are not working.
  - ✓ Works best when it goes to the place that needs fixing



# Method of Levels

- Psychotherapy based on hierarchical PCT
- Tries to move reorganization to the level of the control hierarchy above the systems causing the conflict
  - ✓ Help client go “Up a Level”

“Problems are best solved not on the level where they appear to occur but on the next level above them...Problem are best solved by transcending them and looking at them from a higher viewpoint. At the higher level, the problems automatically resolve themselves because of that shift in point of view, or one might see there was no problem at all.”

David R. Hawkins, 2009. *Healing and Recovery*. Sedona, AZ; Veritas Publishing

# Other Sources of Information about Controlling People

- Here are some web sites to go to if, after reading our book you would like some more detailed information about PCT and MOL.
- PCT
  - ✓ [www.pctweb.org](http://www.pctweb.org)
  - ✓ [www.mindreadings.com](http://www.mindreadings.com)
  - ✓ [www.pctresources.com](http://www.pctresources.com)
- MOL
  - ✓ [www.methodoflevels.com.au](http://www.methodoflevels.com.au)
  - ✓ [www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-control](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-control)