

# **Toward a Theory of Human Agency**



# Toward a Theory of Human Agency

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I am grateful for this opportunity to share my thoughts on science and faith, and I am particularly appreciative of Commissioner Maxwell's suggestion that this occasion also be used as a forum for presenting my own work.

It would be pretentious to attempt a definitive analysis of human agency in a single lecture, for the topic touches every aspect of human experience and, in addition to its breadth, does not lend itself to simple interpretations. One is easily intimidated by the complexity and mystery that infect this domain of inquiry, for agency is not only the key characteristic of human beings but may well be the supreme quality of God himself.

The concept of agency may be subdivided into numerous dimensions such as:

1. The initiation of behavior or the originating of ideas. This may be termed the domain of creation.
2. The processes of decision-making or choosing, that is, the domain of reason.
3. The processes of self-regulation or the domain of will.

These and related topics provide enough substance for several books. For today's purpose, I will simplify and examine only self-regulation. Because this is a complicated topic in itself, I have subdivided further and will propose interpretations primarily of self-control, which is but one aspect of self-regulation.

## SELF-CONTROL

Self-control would not be a matter for scrutiny if it were not for the persuasiveness of its opposite, namely, a lack or loss of self-control. Today, we are often taught and we too often act as though everything controls our behavior except the self or the conscious will. Within the LDS Church this is less often so, but then we are too often guilty of the reverse error, that is, assuming that people are always 100 percent responsible for their own acts.

I thus find myself the man in the middle—trying to persuade my professional colleagues that there is such a thing as self-control while at the same time attempting to convince my fellow Saints that human agency has limitations and, in some cases, is nonexistent.

## Determiners of Behavior at a Choice Point

All human acts are determined by multiple influences. We may identify six broad classes of influence as: (1) cultural, social or environmental controls; (2) biological factors; (3) habits of response that have been conditioned, especially by childhood experiences; (4) feelings or emotions; (5) thoughts, ideas, or beliefs; and (6) spiritual inspiration.

It would be preferable if human beings acted upon the latter three factors primarily, but unfortunately their behavior is too often dominated by influences outside of their control. If we are to be wise, receive the truth, and take the Holy Spirit for our guide as suggested in D&C 45:57, we must learn to optimize the influence of higher processes in our actions. Otherwise, we lose our power of independent action and are “encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell” (Alma 5:7) and then “are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction.” (Alma 12:11.) We shall deal first with the latter state—a loss of power to act independently.

## Absence of Control

As we consider the absence of control, it must be noted that this is a relative statement. Rarely does self-control descend to a zero point; on the other hand, instances of complete self-control are rare. Our degree of control varies between 0 and 100 percent. Some people have much more control than others. Within the same person, the degree of control also varies in different situations. In one area, say eating, one may have low control while in another, say anger, he may have high control.

Loss of control has become a pervasive problem of the modern world. It may be observed in violence, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual excesses and deviations, obesity, indolence, crime, neuroses, insanity, and myriads of other manifestations, most of which have been clearly described or condemned and foretold in the scriptures. (2 Tim. 3:1–7) Each of these excesses has its more moderate forms, and they are common among us—surprising as this may seem.

Inhabitants of nineteenth-century western culture were dominated by the problem of overcontrol, as Sigmund Freud so brilliantly perceived; whereas modern culture is plagued by under-control, as we see every day in our prisons, hospitals, clinics, and streets.

Under-control may follow from cultural norms such as are found in some tribal customs and in the codes of slum street gangs. It may arise from biological defects such as brain damage or hormonal disorders; it may emerge from a particularly traumatic childhood; or it may derive from the consistently bad choices made by otherwise normal individuals. The

degree of personal responsibility for actions thus varies in terms of internal and external conditions impinging upon the person.

The most obvious cases of loss of control are found among psychologically disturbed persons. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of psychopathology is that the person reports being out of control. This may take several forms, and I shall describe two of the most common types. One consists of impulse disorders, of which excessive or deviant sexual behavior would be an example. Such behaviour is often propelled by strong inner drives such as the need for affection, a feeling of dependency, or biological tension. This is an instance of powerful internal stimulation overwhelming the person's conscious controls and dominating his behavior. Some homosexuals, for example, seem to be compulsively driven to frequent and sometimes bizarre sexual acts which they report as occurring without the mediation of conscious intent. The act once repeated, the motivation behind it can become so powerful that one is literally in bondage to the demands of biological impulses and related stimuli. The "chains of hell" is an apt metaphor for such cases.

Another cause of loss of control involves the influence of external stimuli. A phobia is a good example. Persons with classical phobias experience from specific sources a degree of dread and an anticipation of harm that are incomprehensible to normal individuals. Such avoidance reactions may occur in response to stimuli as simple as the sight of a spider or as complex as proximity to members of the opposite sex. In these cases, *external* stimuli have gained control over behavior and evoke automatic fear and avoidance reactions. In such cases there is a good deal of control over behavior, but it is external control; the person feels "out of control" in the sense that withdrawal occurs whether he prefers it or not. This is a classic illustration of how psychopathology reduces freedom by eliminating the possibility of alternative courses of action; in other words, choice is absent. If you have extreme claustrophobia, you have no choice. A closet is such a threatening stimulus that you cannot enter. If you do not have claustrophobia, you may choose to enter or not, as reason and circumstances require. Your range of available alternatives at a choice point is greater, and in that sense you are freer; you have more self-control, or a greater degree of agency.

When self-control is diminished in some measure or in some areas of one's life, one of several specific mechanisms may be the cause. I will mention only three of many, and I will merely name them, since the limitation of time will not permit ample definitions. They are: (1) *Conditioning*. This occurs most often in childhood when traumatic experiences become paired with certain people, places, or things. Phobias are often products of traumatic emotional conditioning. Conditioned responses are automatic and outside of one's control. (2) *Repression*. This is a sister mechanism to

conditioning and involves the pressing into the unconscious of threatening thoughts, impulses, and feelings, which, however, persist in influencing behavior. Responses elicited by unconscious motives thus often seem to occur autonomously and seem to be irrational even though there is a reason behind them. Unconscious forces are some of the greatest challenges to man's rationality and self-control. (3) *Transgression*. Willful or conscious disobedience to moral laws is a misuse of agency; for each such act a measure of agency is lost, and one gradually succumbs to the power of habitual sin. The scriptural reference is "being in the bondage of Satan."

It may seem heretical to propose that for some of mankind agency is extremely limited or nonexistent, but I submit that the processes and examples I have given are based upon valid observations of a worsening human condition and that they are scripturally confirmed as well. I have already cited several scriptural references to this effect and add here the following supporting views:

Brigham Young asserted his views on willful disobedience to God's laws:

A man can dispose of his agency or of his birthright, as did Esau of old, but when disposed of he cannot again obtain it—those who despise the proffered mercies of the Lord . . . have their agency abridged immediately and bounds and limits are set upon their operations . . . evil, when listened to, begins to rule and overule the spirit God has placed within man. (Cited in Widtsoe, 1954, pp. 63, 65).

Talmage noted that in the Judgment the various forces that can limit agency will be taken into account in evaluating one's life on earth:

The inborn tendencies due to heredity, the effect of environment whether conducive to good or evil, the wholesome teaching of youth, the absence of good instruction—these and all other contributory elements must be taken into account in the rendering of a just verdict as to the soul's guilt or innocence. (Talmage, 1915, p. 29).

In reply to the question of why God has caused civilizations to be destroyed, it may be asserted that the Lord's actions were acts of mercy in that these nations or peoples had become so wicked that the children growing up among them had no possibility of developing true agency. Their only opportunity was to choose evil and perpetuate it; therefore, they were destroyed. In support of this Joseph Fielding Smith (1960, p. 55) cites the following comment by John Taylor in his book, *The Government of God* (p. 53):

Hence it was better to destroy a few individuals, than to entail misery on many. And hence the inhabitants of the old world and of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, because it was better for them to die, and thus be deprived of their agency, which they abused, than entail so much misery on their posterity, and bring ruin upon millions of unborn persons.

Further evidence that agency can theoretically be entirely lost is that Satan's plan was a real possibility. This must mean that under the right conditions it is possible to totally control human behavior. We know that men can come under the bondage of sin if they choose evil. To the extent that they do they are under Satan's power, and his plan is implemented to that degree, albeit in the opposite direction of his original proposal. It should be noted here that when we speak of Satan's control we do not necessarily mean that he or his assistants are personally present or directly involved, for he must operate through lawful processes just as the Lord himself does. The loss of one's agency may thus mean that Satan has obtained control over a person by the management of natural processes which the person willfully permitted himself to get hooked into, or which he was conditioned into during childhood.

A final evidence that agency can be severely limited and that this can occur without the person himself making wrong choices is indicated by our knowledge that child-rearing events can shape future responses so powerfully as to virtually eliminate personal responsibility. This is supported by scriptures which declare that small children are not responsible for their acts and cannot be held accountable for them and that if parents do not properly teach them, the eventual sin is put upon the heads of the parents. If the parents are responsible, they must have instituted negative control over the child's behaviour—control with long-lasting effects. It is interesting that no such parental control is implied in relation to positive behavior. This is logical in that positive child rearing induces agency, that is, self-control in the child; whereas negative child rearing induces the bondage of Satan which eliminates choice unless there is outside intervention. There are numerous scriptures supporting this view. (D&C 29:47; D&C 68:25; D&C 74:4; D&C 93:39.) One of the more interesting is Deuteronomy 5:9: ". . . for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Joseph Fielding Smith interpreted this as follows: "The real meaning of this visiting of the iniquity is that when a man transgresses he teaches his children to transgress, and they follow his teachings. It is natural for children to follow in the practices of their fathers and by doing so suffer from the parents' iniquity. . . . (1957, p.83) The term *natural* in the foregoing sentence probably can be interpreted as natural psychological processes, such as imitative learning, conditioning, and repression.

The existence of such losses of control or agency has been brought forcefully to my awareness during long hours of counseling as a psychotherapist and as a bishop. I have been convinced by many years of experience that every human being suffers defects of agency and control to some degree and that in a minority of cases the level of control has been so

seriously reduced by biological defects or malignant childhood training that they are, in effect, not responsible for their behavior. I am not speaking here of the normal cross-section of human weaknesses, even though they limit agency to some degree; because if we had perfect agency, it is doubtful that this life would be a test for us. Certainly, no one should be encouraged by these remarks to justify his misdeeds on the grounds that he is not responsible for his behavior. Our goal should be to resist the history of evil, to reverse the sins of our fathers, and to initiate a benign cycle that will traverse the generations and help people establish new levels of self-regulation. There is nothing more pitiful than the person who wants to control his behavior but is unable to do so. Such individuals are buffeted by their own fears and impulses; their behavior is dominated by Satan. In such instances self-effort alone will not suffice.

I would like to share with you two examples from my own experience. In both cases the presenting problem was compulsive or uncontrollable homosexuality.

I found that a complex set of factors was operating in each of these cases. Not only was there a compulsive symptom but there were common underlying predispositions. Of great importance was the fact that each suffered from a phobia—an intense fear of the opposite sex. As personal involvement with a member of the opposite sex increased, anxiety increased until feelings of panic ensued and the relationship was disrupted. In addition, each of these persons lacked an adequate repertoire of social skills appropriate for engaging in normal male-female contacts and for deepening such relationships. And finally, each person had made the error of seeking warmth, security, and intimacy exclusively with members of the same sex and had permitted this pattern to develop into a powerfully reinforcing biological relationship. In doing so, their behavior became dominated by the immediacy of needs for affection and bodily satisfaction to the point that the ability to consciously choose was virtually obliterated. We thus had three factors contributing to a serious diminution of agency: a phobia, a deficient social repertoire, and weakened impulse control.

Our treatment of these cases cannot be documented in detail here, but it consisted first of reducing fears of the opposite sex by means of a technique called systematic desensitization. This consists of reversing the old childhood conditioning of avoidance responses to heterosexual stimuli by manipulating the client's feeling states so that positive responses are repeatedly paired with and associated with the feared object. This gradually increases control, in that panic is no longer the invariable and automatic, response to the formerly phobic events. Secondly, we trained these persons by means of role playing or behavioral rehearsal in appropriate social skills because we soon learned that the removal of the phobic symptoms merely



brought about the possibility of heterosexual adequacy. That is, systematic desensitization reduced an inhibition but did not provide a program of positive approach behavior. Once the new skills were learned, a third problem remained, namely, that there was still a compelling sexual impulse that persisted due to a lack of self-control and the strong biological reinforcement inherent in the act that made the arousal of control difficult. We therefore instituted a self-control training procedure to assist in the agonizing struggle with the impulses which these clients had determined to overcome. Everything we had done up to this point prepared the way by gradually developing new controls and effectiveness in previously weak areas, but the critical difficulty still lay before us.

Before proceeding, I should parenthetically point out that if attempts as self-control of impulses had been initiated without these other changes, they probably would have failed; failure is the usual result when self-effort responses alone are implemented. Self-effort is admirable but ineffective in severe cases where so much control has been lost. In these instances it is essential to reduce the strength of factors maintaining the undesirable behavior before proceeding directly to enhancing will power. This usually requires the assistance of others who temporarily aid the person in establishing new levels of control that could not be achieved by self-effort alone. At the same time, it is equally important to build up positive behaviors that can provide prosocial satisfactions as alternatives to the negative behavior that is being inhibited. Simply telling such a person to "go control himself" will not do.

We next proceeded to develop and apply a method of direct training in control (Bergin, 1969). This technique involved, first, a careful assessment of the events immediately preceding the arousal and consummation of a sexual impulse. This detailed, point-by-point analysis revealed that a consistent pattern of events led to each occasion where impulse control had been lost. The sequence of behaviors thus identified was initially unnoticed and unattended to by the client. Persistent focusing upon this preimpulsive time period was necessary before these events became clear and a logical interpretation of the disturbing behavior became possible.

This diagnostic analysis of impulse-related events yielded a striking view of what was happening during these periods of compulsive, unwanted consummation. Clearly evident was a spiraling sequence of stimuli and reactions which, as they mounted in intensity, became impossible to control. I have described this phenomenon as an *impulse-response chain*.

An illustration of how the chain proceeded is given as follows in terms of Stimuli (S) and Responses (R):

S (male person in public place) R (Glance toward person) ————  
 S (return of glance) R (mild emotion and fantasy plus additional glance)

———— S (establishment of visual contact) ————— R (intensified emotion and fantasy plus movement toward person) ————— S (physical proximity) R (heightened desire) S (heightened desire) R (verbal exchange) ————— S (verbal exchange) R (interpersonal engagement) ————— S (interpersonal engagement) R (intense feelings, memories and fantasies) ————— S (feelings, memories and fantasies) R (physical involvement) ————— S (body contact) R (consummatory behavior).

After laborious efforts had identified a number of sequences of this type, the client was encouraged to interrupt any impulse-response chain as soon as he became conscious of its presence. It was explained that failures in self-control often occurred because the effort to control was applied late in the sequence when the impulsive pattern had already reached a high level of intensity. Thus, the unexercised and undeveloped control ability was weak compared to the strength of the impulse, and it had to be applied early in the sequence to insure success.

The client was then instructed to pay close attention to environmental situations and to personal reactions that might set off the undesired chain of events. It was evident that in the past he had not been aware of these events until they had reached an intermediate or high intensity; therefore two or three therapy sessions were devoted to repeatedly going over the chains and making them as explicit as possible.

Techniques for interrupting responses to stimuli early in the chains were discussed and, in imagination, practiced during the sessions. These included methods such as immediately switching to thoughts or activities unrelated to the chain, but it was always emphasized that this be done promptly so as to apply the greatest strength of control to the weakest strength impulse. This procedure of shutting off impulse-related reactions and immediately engaging in another activity (reading, walking, thinking) was very much a simple act of will motivated by the client's desire for change and by the hope and compliance engendered by the therapist's instructions.

Following this procedure was difficult for the client at first, presumably because it totally reversed a strongly reinforced habit, but by persistence and encouragement he was soon able to practice it regularly. The client reported his experience in much the same terms in which addicts do. He described it as a feeling of climbing a very steep hill with a large pack on his back. Each effort at control was like another step up this impossible incline; but almost unexpectedly he seemed to reach a crest and the effort was then downhill and easy the rest of the way.

The potency of this technique seems to lie in applying it to a specific problem which arises from an inadequately developed self-regulatory system. The emphasis here is on the assumption that there are such things as

primary developmental defects in self-control which are responsive chiefly to techniques that emphasize the *self* in self-control, namely that the defect lies in the unpracticed will, in the self that does not consciously and vigorously regulate.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these cases is the phenomenon of impulse weakening as a direct result of consistent exercise in self-regulation. The result of this effort was that the clients soon gained control of their behavior in the presence of formerly compelling stimuli.

It appears that active resistance to the undesirable response to a stimulus tends to break the stimulus-response chain and the stimuli lose their power to compel or control the individual's behavior. It also appears that the feelings and fantasies formerly associated with this range of stimuli actually disappeared as responses to them.

Another way to describe the results of the self-control method is nicely exemplified by President McKay's advice: "Resist temptation and Satan will flee from you." He declared that this is exactly what happened during the Savior's three great temptations. According to President McKay, because of the Savior's resistance Satan's power had been broken by the time of the final temptation, and he was merely pleading. Then the Savior turned his back on Satan with finality and commanded him to get hence.

Such insight led the Prophet to declare eloquently: "The greatest battles of life are fought within the silent clammers of our own souls." This is the battle for self-control, and there is nothing more majestic than the quiet confidence of one who has achieved it.

The management of self-effort responses has been applied in a number of additional cases, both normal and pathological, with relative success. The process seems to follow a regular pattern which permit theoretical interpretation, although the notions I will now offer should not be dignified by the term *theory*. *Minitheory* will suffice.

### **Toward a Theory of Self-Control**

Our thesis is that when a person consciously selects a behavioral goal and then finds his pathway to that goal obstructed by habits, impulses, or feelings over which he has little control, he can overcome these obstacles by the exercise of self-effort. Technically it may be stated thus: The power of a consciously perceived stimulus to evoke an undesired response is directly proportional to the frequency with which the undesired response occurs. Decline in the power of such a stimulus complex is a direct function of the frequency with which the individual consciously and effectively resists acting out the usual response. A corollary hypothesis is that stimuli early in the chain of behavior will evoke a weaker response and that responses of that order will be more readily inhibited than those of a higher order. If

inhibition occurs more frequently at that level, breaking of the main, over-arching stimulus-response connection will be more frequent and more successful.

The essence of these propositions may be described schematically, but that is not our purpose here. For the mathematically inclined, we briefly suggest the following possibilities:

(1) If we place on the abscissa of a graph *% of successful resistances* from 0 to 100 and place on the ordinate the *power of the stimulus to evoke an undesirable response*, we should obtain a monotonically decreasing curve having a quadratic mathematical function.

(2) A similar function will occur when the *time of resistance* is placed on the ordinate and is estimated from early to late, while maintaining the *% resistance* variable on the abscissa.

(3) A monotonically increasing curve should appear when *% of resistances early* in the impulse-response sequence is placed on the ordinate with *% successful resistances* of the abscissa.

A number of experimental designs follow naturally from the statement of the preceding views. Here are two of the more central ones:

1. Given a group of persons attempting to overcome a habit, those who exercise maximal effort early in the response chain will be more successful than those who do not. Two or more experimental groups could be set up, each of them being instructed to exercise effort at different points in the response sequence. A good example would be a weight-watchers group, some of whom would be counseled to inhibit at the first thought of food, others after a snack was spread, and still others after having infested the first morsel of some delicacy such as the first piece in a box of chocolates.

2. Groups might be compared which differ not in the timing of inhibition in the response chain but in the proportion of times resistance is exercised in relation to the number of occasions on which the stimulus appears. The hypothesis would be that success would be a direct function of the size of this proportion and that as the proportion of resistances rose, the strength of the evoking stimulus would geometrically decline. It is also probable that a critical ratio or proposition exists and that it may vary for different control problems; therefore, the concept does imply that the description of self-control processes will be ultimately quantifiable to at least a crude degree.

It is of special importance to emphasize that the self-effort or self-control responses alluded to here must occur in a context that optimizes the probabilities for success. This is based on the previous assumption that behaviors at a choice point are multiply determined. If the theorized effects are to occur, other factors must be controlled or minimized, such as biological defects, environmental pathology, conditioned anxiety responses,

rewards for undesirable behavior, and incorrect beliefs. There are a number of therapeutic techniques available for achieving such behavioral management, although we cannot discuss them today.

### **Characteristics of Positive Self-Control**

A growing substantive literature provides us with an increasingly useful picture of what it means to possess and maintain positive self-control within the context of an effective life style. This moves us beyond the specific details of clinical pathology into the broad sweep of everyday life where control responses are harmoniously blended with expressive behavior into a balanced, self-regulated life.

The first quality of self-control is that it consists of voluntary action, and voluntary behavior require a choice situation in which at least two incompatible acts are possible. The scriptures tell us that if there were no opposition, no law of opposites, there could be no agency. "And it must needs be that the devil tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves." (D&C 29:39.)

A second quality is the prominence of awareness or consciousness in self-control and the mediation of this control by language or other symbolic processes. "An action is truly voluntary only when it can be begun or can be checked by verbal cues." (Guthrie, 1938, p. 174.) A person is responsible when his behavior can thus be guided by symbols. Children, for example, acquire responsibility as they acquire control of action through language. A similar process occurs in all forms of psychotherapy. Freud stated this succinctly in his epigram, "Where Id is, there shall Ego be." In other words, in the course of therapy the ego gains control over the passions of the id by making the unconscious conscious. (Parenthetically, it is important for students to know that Freud stood for such ideas rather than the libertinism with which his name is associated. He was a great man and one not to be ignored by LDS scholars.)

The aspect of self-control next in importance is the role of beliefs or convictions. Terry has said that "character is the ability to inhibit instinctive impulses in accordance with a regulative principle." That is, there is a time and place for expressiveness, but it must be regulated in terms of internal guides such as goals and ideas. Convictions imply a concept of something beyond self, beyond individual need which regulates processes of goal direction, achievement, and management of a positive life style. Convictions differentiate those who will behave in the "natural" way from those who aspire to the higher planes of civilization and righteousness.

A large number of research studies permits us to outline additional specific dimensions of self-control and self-regulation. These include:

(1) The ability to delay gratification, to resist the temptation of immediate rewards or pleasures in favor of more distant and often higher satisfactions, in accordance with abstract principles of right and wrong. This includes the ability to tolerate tension, discomfort, and frustration.

(2) The ability to discern clearly the connections between means and ends, between behaviors and their immediate and ultimate consequences. It is the inability to maintain awareness of means-ends sequences, that is, to anticipate consequences, that commonly characterizes the impulsive behavior of delinquents and criminals.

(3) The ability to frame one's life and behavior within a future time perspective. The briefer one's time span, the greater is the difficulty with self-control. The more one is capable of long-range planning, the better is his control.

(4) An internal locus of control. Self-regulatory deficiencies often arise in persons who feel that they are the passive subjects of the forces surrounding them. Their external locus of control leads them to behave in ways that only reinforce their belief in fate.

(5) A sensitive guilt response. Guilt is a signal to us that something is wrong and, in that sense, it is friendly. Guilt aids us in preserving the integrity of our controls just as pain assists us in preserving the integrity of our bodies. If pain did not alert us to physical dangers and diseases, we would soon die. If our guilt mechanisms are not alert to moral dangers, we die just as certainly in a spiritual sense. While it is possible to overdo guilt and become neurotically obsessed with seeming misdeeds, this is not usually the case. Cultivating a positive guilt response is therefore adaptively in the service of effective self-regulation.

A number of additional factors influence degree of control, and I will merely list some of those that my students and I discovered in a study conducted at Teachers College, Columbia University.

#### COMBINED CONCEPT LIST (N=20)

1. Mood or affective tone and its intensity affect degree of control.
2. Regulation is influenced by the subjectively evaluated importance of the task.
3. Subjectively evaluated liking or disliking for task influences regulation.
4. Existence of external deadlines or other concrete demands affects regulation. Formally structured role requirements are similar and affect self-regulation.
5. Self-imposed plans and structure affect control:

- (A) Short-range schedules, lists, goals, deadlines, routines. This can yield over-control and eventual loss of control due to unadaptive rigidity.
- (B) Long-range planning which imposes structure on the general course of life and task behavior.
- 6. Overcoming inertia to perform a task diminishes difficulty in performing or resisting the task on later trials.
- 7. Positive or negative social reinforcement influences control in either direction, depending on whether approval or disapproval is involved and which behavior it is contingent upon. (Control or expression may be involved.) How important the social evaluator is influences the potency of this variable.
- 8. A sense of responsibility and obligation to others influences self control.
- 9. Feeling loved, accepted, and nurtured by significant others influences degree of regulation.
- 10. Material reward versus deprivation influences regulation.
- 11. The degree of confidence, competence, self-esteem, assurance, and security with regard to tasks and decisions influences regulation.
- 12. Organismic variables influence degree of regulation.
  - (A) Fatigue lessens control.
  - (B) Physiological withdrawal symptoms lessen control.
  - (C) Degree of sickness-health or good-bad physical feeling influences control.
- 13. Interludes of diversion, relaxation, self-expression, or gratification during periods requiring regulation may facilitate or restrict self-regulation, depending on circumstances.
- 14. Feeling in control and being able to control seem to increase with age (although there appear to be individual developmental fluctuations).
- 15. Withdrawing or escaping from the situation may increase control or affect control in a difficult situation.
- 16. The length of delay of gratification is a function of:
  - (A) the subjective importance or magnitude of the situation;
  - (B) the amount or power of immediate gratification;
  - (C) greater gain or sense of challenge by the delay.
- 17. The degree of awareness of emotion or impulse influences ability to control.

18. Awareness of a tendency to lose control or of having lost control leads to greater ability to regain control.
19. Understanding the realities of the situation enhances ability to control. Cognitive belief that the situation can be changed is a factor here.
20. Knowledge and understanding of oneself is a factor in regulation.
21. The effect of perceiving others out of control may increase one's own ability to control.
22. Repetition of irritating, frustrating stimuli may lead to loss of control.
23. Experience and practice in control may enhance degree of control.
24. Undesirable or inappropriate impulses may be channeled by means of substitution, displacement, or fantasy.
25. Awareness of legal sanctions can be an incentive to control.

#### SUBJECTS OF STUDY

1. office worker 2. college undergraduate 3. alcoholic 4. commercial artist 5. neurotic 6. policeman 7. female graduate student 8. housewife 9. male graduate student 10. female mental patient 11. male mental patient 12. small proprietor 13. singer-actor 14. artist 15. dancer 16. secretary 17. male homosexual 18. weight watcher 19. assaultive prisoner 20. addicted prostitute.

To summarize the characteristics, we may phrase self-control as the ability to direct one's behavior toward general, satisfying goals rather than to be pushed by needs (Murray, Freud, Hull) or pulled by stimuli. One may define self-regulation by stating what it is *not*. It is not a push-pull theory. One regulates his own behavior; his behavior is *not* regulated for him by social reinforcement, parental conditioning, authoritarian power, libidinal instincts, or hormonal cycles.

It is the ability, first, to make a choice, to evaluate the consequences of that chosen course of action, and to prize the outcomes, and then it is the capacity to marshal one's energy in effective pursuit of the consequences or goals subtended by that choice.

It is the ability to reflect when the impulse is to act, especially when the impulse to act runs counter to valued habits or when it presents a new course of behavior. It is the ability to act effectively when the course is clear, the ability to force upon oneself consciousness of consequences and the facing of reality when the inclination is to submerge awareness and give the self immediate gratification, that is, the ability to widen perception when the tendency is to narrow it. It is to resist persuasion and to judge for oneself in the sense of Emerson's "Self Reliance."



It is the ability to modulate, to rule feeling, passion, habit, and inclination, not with an iron hand, but rather with a sense of timing and regulation which maximized outcomes for oneself and others. It is the ability to submerge oneself in feeling when it is useful, appropriate, or right, thus to enrich one's existence. It is thus the ability to delay gratification, but not to avoid it entirely. Like the steam regulator, it permits expression, but only in useful or safe channels.

In general, it is the ability to increase one's freedom in terms of the valued alternatives available, and it merges into the subjective experience of feeling free and self-determined.

### **Self-Control Agency, and Theories of Man**

Today's most prominent academic psychologist, B. F. Skinner of Harvard, has declared that "behavior is determined not from within but from without." He argues that all human behavior is controlled by external contingencies of reward and punishment, and that the goals of psychology are (a) to understand how the mechanisms of external control operate and (b) to manage these mechanisms so as to obtain maximum control over human behavior in the service of creating a benign society. While much of Skinner's experimental work must be considered of great value, his philosophical pronouncements regarding the nature of man are offensive and, fortunately, unsubstantiated.

Unfortunately, his views epitomize a dominant theme of twentieth-century psychology, which is the embracing of psychological phenomena within a schema of laws, statistical and mechanical, having the purpose of achieving the goal of controlling and predicting human behavior. The primary scientific paradigm for psychology has thus been that of the biological physical sciences.

My own counterthesis is that human behavior cannot be accounted for within the framework of physicalistic natural laws, even statistical ones, and that the main premises upon which these views are based are false. This may appear to be a dramatic apostasy by a person so deeply involved with and committed to the field of psychology; however, I see it more as a call to reform than as a rejection.

It is my thesis that human behavior may be and often is controlled by the individual himself and that any hypothetical "mechanisms" that enter into this behavior process are *self*-regulatory mechanisms.

The idea of self-regulation necessarily carries with it a rejection of the usual psychological theorizing as to the "lawful determination" of behavior. It does not, however, preclude the possibility of establishing verbal or mathematical descriptions of behavioral regularities. It only assumes that

the individual's habitual manner of making choices and of regulating his behavior must be a crucial ingredient of these formulae. This commitment to the notion of *self*-generated behavior means that while understanding and prediction may be possible, control of behavior is not possible except in extreme cases of pathology, such as those described, or in unusual instances of environmental control, such as concentration camps or prisons. Thus, while the individual may assist the scientist's theorizing by reporting his style of choosing and self-regulating, this does not give the scientists control of that style.

None of the foregoing should be construed as a repudiation of the field of psychology; many of its observations and techniques are of great value, and I personally make my living promoting and implementing them. I am instead calling for a radical reform of the ideological assumptions that lie behind much of this work. I hope that I and many of you will be allied with all of those who are calling for the infusion of a new spirit into this field and for the formulation of new theories that square more precisely with our perceptions of *human* nature as distinct from physical and animal nature. This paper is one step in that direction, and hopefully it is consonant with the following, slightly paraphrased, revelation: "Intelligence or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be . . . all intelligence is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself; otherwise there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man. . . ." (D&C 93:29–31.)

In conclusion, I have three brief messages for those of you who are students. First, let me say that while I do not look to psychology for my salvation or that of mankind, I do view it (together with the related behavioral sciences) as one of the most exciting and potentially useful fields of inquiry that exists. While some of its practitioners promote bizarre theories and engage in unethical behavior, the major thrust of the field is a positive and progressive one. I suggest in all candor and sincerity that psychology is as fundamental to the implementation of the principles of gospel living (the Christian life style) as medical science is to the implementation of the Word of Wisdom. Just as biomedical research reveals to us the mechanisms underlying the principles of the Lord's code of physical health and thereby provides us with a more positive control over the health of our bodies so also, behavioral science informs us of the processes underlying revealed principles of living and provides us with improved power to promote the health of mind and spirit. Psychology is thus as basic to the study of living as biochemistry is to the study of life. It is, in my estimation, the most important secular subject matter for Latter-day Saints to know.

Second, some personal advice. The ideal of self-control is supreme. This life is atest—is a test—is a test. You have not passed until you have

endured to the end and are dead. You will be tried every day of your life, whether you know it or not.

Today we are all bombarded by stimuli toward the loosening of moral controls. The provocation is enormous. You must practice self-control and have a strong repertoire of such abilities so that when stress comes, you can cope. Mercifully, the Lord permits us small doses of evil to practice our control on before we are hit with real temptation, but then it comes. We must all be tried, and led me assure you that means a real trial, before we are fit for his Kingdom.

If you are to err, do it on the side of overcontrol—that can be redeemed—but the excesses of undercontrol can have fatal, irredeemable consequences. Therefore, stay close to the Church, follow its leaders, and seek the guidance of the spirit.

As for me, you may wish to know where I stand with respect to the gospel. I believe it is especially important for those of us in psychology to declare ourselves on this matter because we have too often been the pariahs of our own subculture.

I am a thoroughly converted, 100 percent supporter of the doctrines and principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I believe completely in the spiritual realities and divine manifestations that undergird and reinforce the sweeping fabric of Mormon culture and commitment. I have experienced the indescribable, witnessing communication of divine knowledge, and it has transformed me from humanist to disciple. I do not apologize for nor equivocate in my conviction that the God of heaven is a living, personal reality and that I have an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ upon whom I am dependent for salvation and exaltation. I know that he lives, and I declare in all solemnity as a witness to all men that I know he walked and talked with the Prophet Joseph Smith, that through the Prophet he reestablished the Kingdom of God on earth, and that he presides today over this great Church, inspiring our modern prophet and all associated with him. All this I declare in the name of Jesus Christ Amen.

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