

## CHAPTER 5

# Beyond Normal: Toward Optimal Control and Psychological Well-Being

**W**E USE the word *toward* in the title of this chapter because we are on more difficult ground when trying to posit *optimal* control and its relationship to positive psychological health. There has been much less research done on what Maslow (1968) called the “farther reaches of human nature.” As we saw in chapter 4, most research and clinical work has investigated control issues of pathology and what psychology has defined as normal. In part this makes sense, because psychology and psychiatry were born out of a concern with mental illness and seeking to understand suboptimal, pathological states.

For example, Freud’s *Collected Papers* contains 400 references to neurosis, but none to health (1959a). Further, all psychiatric categories of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* are pathological (DSM-IV, 1994). But as noted in Chapter 4, a complete understanding of positive psychological health can never be developed solely through a study of mental illness.

In this chapter we approach the discussion of optimal control profiles in two ways. First, we examine what it means to go beyond what Maslow (1971) referred to as the psychopathology of the average (i.e., go “beyond the normal control profile”). Second, we explore the question of “control toward what,” addressing the question of what might be the highest values and goals for which control may be used. In addressing these questions, we draw on the wisdom of both the perennial spiritual traditions and modern psychology.

Optimal control in our model is essentially about balance within and between each of the four components of our first postulate:

1. The assertive and yielding modes
2. Agency from self and other
3. Neither too high nor too low desire for control, and conscious thought about where the desire for control is directed
4. Sense of control through the appropriate blending of agency, mode, and desire

Our model suggests that such balance and integration involves matching the right agency and mode of control to the correct domain (e.g., relationship, work, self) at the appropriate point in the life cycle, while honoring individual differences. Table 5.1 summarizes the movement from suboptimal to optimal control across the key components of our model: desire for control, modes of control, agency of control, and sense of control.

### DESIRE FOR CONTROL

We begin with a discussion of desire for control, briefly noting where problems have occurred—either in suboptimal or normal control profiles—and then point out what we would regard as optimal. As we shall see, optimal desire for control involves three tasks: recognizing when the desire for control has become excessive or inappropriate; overcoming apathy, developing enthusiasm, and raising the desire for control when focused on appropriate goals; and channeling control desire in life-affirming ways.

There are two sets of problems with desire for control. In suboptimal control, there can be too low a desire, involving passivity, depression, unwillingness to venture forth, indecision, and inhibition. There can also be too high a desire for control, as reflected in obsessive-compulsive disorder, restricted eating disorders, Type A behavior, violent behaviors, and part of the control profile of patients with generalized anxiety disorder.

In normals, too high a desire for control can occur when they try to protect the competent and special self and engage in competitive ego games. Further, normal control desires can often be reflexive and misdirected. Finally, no one can get enough control to satisfy ever-increasing wants and needs, which leads inevitably to greediness and grasping. Interestingly, although there are *DSM-IV* categories related to too little desire, there are none reflecting excessive desire for control, perhaps partly because of the cultural assumptions in the United States regarding the value of individual entrepreneurship and the status associated with a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption.

TABLE 5.1

## FROM SUBOPTIMAL TO OPTIMAL CONTROL

	Suboptimal Control	Normal Control Profile	Problems with Normal Control	Optimal Control
Desire for Control	Low desire for control	Desire for control provides motivational impetus for active control efforts	Expectations for control exceed ability to control; desire for control becomes reflexive/habitual (i.e., we are controlled by control)	One is able to exercise conscious choice in terms of the appropriate level and object (self, environment) of control desire—desire is directed not solely toward self needs but toward others' welfare
Modes of Control	Quadrant 4—too little control (e.g., helplessness)	Quadrant 1—regain control through active instrumental efforts, goal setting, self-responsibility	Quadrant 3—overcontrol (active efforts to control that which is uncontrollable)	Ability to use Quadrant 1 and Quadrant 2 (positive assertive and yielding modes) in a balanced and flexible way, depending on the context. Acceptance and trans-formation of Quadrants three and four.
Agency of Control	Feeling one is powerless—unable to gain control from self-initiated efforts	Sense of personal empowerment—ability to gain control without relying on others ("the competent and special self")	<i>Reliance</i> on self becomes a stressor— inability to gain control from other support leads to problems with intimacy and exaggerated view of "specialness;" causes one to over-estimate ability and become defensive when this self is threatened in some way	One is able to gain a sense of control from self efforts <i>and</i> can turn to others as potential sources of control—neither overrelies on self or other for control
Sense of Control	Feeling lack of control	Use of defenses and cognitive reframing (i.e., "positive illusions") to restore sense of control	Illusions of control, defenses, and external attributions can lead to denial of one's internal experience (inaccurate perceptions of self and world). Tranquelize self in trivia. Don't learn from mistakes	Ability to gain control without relying on reality distorting illusions or defenses—balance of assertive and yielding modes and self and other agency. Use of values. Choice to determine what is worth gaining control over in both the inner and outer worlds

## OPTIMAL CONTROL THROUGH CONTROLLING DESIRES

Part of our model of optimal control involves learning to control and curb excessive or inappropriate desire: to examine where desires are directed (i.e., what is the object of control—self or other?). As Bandura (1989b) noted, control can be expressed both over one's self—thoughts, behaviors, cognitions (Mahoney & Thoresen, 1974)—or over others—control of the situation, environment, and other people (Adler, 1964; McClelland, 1975).

At a basic level, this view can be understood in the seminal work on delay of gratification (Mischel, 1974), in which an individual utilizes impulse control to postpone immediate small desires for longer-term larger desires. Research shows that those who are able to learn delay of gratification at a young age have significantly fewer behavioral problems in later life (Goleman, 1995).

At a more subtle level, optimal control involves learning to distinguish needs from wants, recognizing that the latter may not be essential for happiness (Keyes, 1975). In terms of wants, optimal control can involve switching desire for control over external objects to a desire for internal (self-)control.

This theme of developing self-discipline and control, and the elimination of self-serving desires, is echoed in several spiritual traditions. For example, the first two of Buddha's Four Noble Truths are that life is suffering and that suffering is caused by desire. In this tradition, it is ever-increasing wants and cravings that ultimately cause pain.

What causes mental suffering in the Buddhist view is the desire to get life to conform to a particular notion of how things should be, as opposed to how they really are. As Jackson (1995) noted:

In the course of everyday life we spend the majority of our time immersed in self-centered thoughts: *Why did this happen to me? What would make me feel better? If only I could make more money, win her heart, make my boss appreciate me.* The thoughts themselves are not the problem; it's our desperate clinging to them and our resistance to what's actually happening that causes us so much anguish. The point of Zen practice is to make you aware of the thoughts that run your life and diminish their power over you. (p. 49)

Similarly, in Islam, it is said that the good Muslim "subordinates passion and impulse to reasonable and ethical self-restraint. He faces life's trials with patience, endurance and fortitude" (Lapidus, 1976, p. 96). Confucianism also highly values self-control, internal regulation, self-sufficiency, and freedom from covetousness (Tseng, 1972). Baba Hari Dass, describing tantra yoga within the Hindu tradition, noted that it helps individuals who "find it difficult to control the attractions of the senses toward worldly objects." According to these views, the task is not to acquire the objects toward which the senses are attracted, but to learn to control sense attachments.

From the Judeo-Christian tradition, this view is reflected in the Ten Commandments, which give individuals instructions regarding controlling themselves. In Christianity, one is advised to practice patience, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). Similarly, the *Pirke Avot* (the Jewish “Wisdom of the Ancestors”) asks: “Who is strong? The person who can control his desires. . . . He who is slow to anger is better than the strong man.” Further, as the American philosopher/transcendentalist Thoreau commented, “A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.”

To gain this optimal self-control involves paying systematic attention to one’s motivation for control, to notice subtle, unconscious, reactive, control-related habits and desires. This attention involves recognition of how it is possible to bring about self-created suffering through conditioned and reflexive attachments and desires, as well as fears and avoidances.

Holding such an orientation results in becoming less attached to possessions. As Ryokan said with tranquility after his valuables were taken:

The thief left it behind—  
the moon  
at the window.

#### OPTIMAL CONTROL THROUGH INCREASING OUR DESIRE

Desmund Tutu (1990) noted that one of the great dangers of racial discrimination is that “you are brainwashed into an acquiescence in your oppression” (p. 274). He therefore asked whites to “throw off the lethargy and apathy of affluence” (*ibid*) to join the struggle against apartheid. One of the problems with desire in the normal control profile can be complacency, an understandable reluctance to recognize that change needs to occur in certain areas of life.

The word *enthusiasm* comes from the Greek, meaning “in God.” Having energy and desire for change can be seen as a gift. It is that desire which has given rise to the great creative acts, inventions, and technological mastery in our world. From this perspective, it is useful to cultivate a desire for control. This means overcoming the resistance and denial mechanisms that insist everything is okay, overcoming the inertia of the status quo, and acknowledging there is something to alter and improve.

#### OPTIMAL CONTROL THROUGH CHANNELING OUR DESIRES

The third viewpoint regarding optimal control and desires relates to controlling desires through channeling them for higher purposes. In some

ways, this channeling of desires may be considered similar to Freud's sublimation, but without the repressive, super-egoic, negative qualities such sublimation typically implies.

For example, in Tantra Yoga, sexual energy and desire is not something to be eliminated, but rather channeled to and connected with the heart and even the divine nature of the cosmos (Anand, 1995; Free-John, 1978). According to this view we live in a realm of desire, each sense craving . . . our tongue seeks exciting new taste and our sense of touch desiring contact of one kind or another.

Tantra, recognizing the powerful energy aroused by our desires, sees that if this energy is transformed, it can be an indispensable resource for the spiritual path and improving personal and interpersonal well-being.

Our goal here is not to recommend a specific belief system (e.g., spiritual unity), but rather to illustrate a model of channeling desires in ways that decrease personal suffering and increase well-being. Therefore, optimal desire for control involves learning to direct desire for control toward the control of desire. Further, it involves developing conscious choice about where, over what, and why to seek such control. It is important to go beyond mere self-aggrandizement and ego gratification to the desire to control one's thoughts, mind, and behavior in the service of others' welfare.

## MODES OF CONTROL

In this section we briefly summarize the mismatch problems that can occur with the four modes of control. We then point out what we regard as optimal: having the skills of both positive modes, including matching modes to circumstances, finding a balance and integration between the two positive modes, and acknowledging that all four modes exist in everyone.

Problems occur in one of two control mismatches: when individuals attempt to exercise control where they cannot or should not, and when they exercise too little control where they can and should.

### SKILLS OF BOTH POSITIVE MODES

Optimal control involves having the skills of both modes of control, assertive and yielding. However, this position does not mean we advocate a homogenized one-size-fits-all approach.

For those whose Quadrant 4 primary mode is negative yielding, learning an assertive mode is important to overcome the fear and timidity that prevent them from pursuing their goals. A person can also use Quadrant 2 positive yielding as a way to deal with negative yielding (Quadrant 4). For

example, the adult child of an alcoholic may learn to accept his parents and move on with his life, without making any changes in the parents.

On the other hand, some clients may believe they are using Quadrant 2 acceptance strategies (i.e., through the use of cognitive reprogramming: e.g. "It's ok. I'm not bothered by this."), but this may in fact represent negative yielding (Quadrant 4) passivity. Such an effort may represent a failure to change that which needs to be changed in themselves or the environment.

There are also two different strategies for those whose efforts at gaining a sense of control are excessive, manifesting as too high a desire for control, negative assertive overcontrol, or an inability to accept that which is uncontrollable. On the one hand, it may be helpful to learn more of the yielding mode, curbing the desire for control itself, and learning how not always to be driven by the desire for more. However, one can also use positive assertive approaches (Quadrant 1) to address negative assertive overcontrol. For example, a person can channel his or her feelings of anger and hostility toward constructive change and generativity.

Finally, it is not enough to have both skills. Individuals must learn to match skills to circumstances and domains (e.g., work, relationship). Analogous to case studies in the androgyny literature (Bem 1977, Spence et al., 1979, Foushee et al., 1979, Kaplan, 1979), a person high in assertive and yielding skills, but who only uses assertive skills in intimate interpersonal relationships and yielding skills at work, may have both skills but not be matching them well to circumstances.

#### BALANCE AND INTEGRATION AMONG POSITIVE MODES

The two positive modes are not either/or. As Jung (1973) said, one of the best ways to teach individuals how to change their behavior and actions is to teach them how to accept themselves. To effect change often requires acceptance of a situation in order to move beyond it. Similarly, acceptance itself often involves learning skills of changing negative cognitive thoughts ("I am not good enough") to self-appreciative ones ("I can love and accept myself just as I am"). Just like the Chinese symbol of yin and yang, there are elements of each mode within the other (integration), and the whole involves the harmonizing of the two parts (balance).

Our own research and clinical experience suggest that optimal psychological health is reflected in a balanced and integrated use of both positive modes of control. The ability to adopt a positive yielding orientation makes it more likely that one's use of positive assertive strategies will not lead to negative assertive overcontrol. Likewise, the ability to utilize a positive assertive mode helps ensure that a Quadrant 2, positive yielding approach to control related issues will not become negative yielding, Quadrant 4.

For example, an individual who feels her competence threatened by a poor performance on some work-related task can use positive assertive strategies to improve her efforts on the job while also utilizing a positive yielding mode of control in which she accepts herself as she is with whatever imperfections, limitations, or habits of laziness she may have. Such higher-level strategies can enable her to regain a sense of control without needing to make inaccurate or unfair external attributions of blame, deny the reality that perhaps the work she had done *was* below par, become overly negative and self-critical regarding her performance, or be overly complacent or unwilling to modify her behavior (as a defense against losing esteem).

#### ACKNOWLEDGING ALL FOUR MODES

As Jung (1939) also suggested, an important part of psychological growth involves acknowledging and to a certain extent accepting the shadow side of one's personality. In an effort to help integrate the assertive and yielding modes, it is useful to have a client visualize or represent each of the four modes to learn how he views them.

For example, Joyce, a 44-year-old female attorney, saw her Quadrant 4 image as a passive, helpless ragdoll lying in the corner of her room on a wooden chair. Her Quadrant 3, overcontrolling self wore glasses and was formal, stiff, and proper, a tough mother drill sergeant. She hated both these sides of herself.

As we explored deeper, however, Joyce was able to recognize the positive role that each of these aspects of herself was trying to play. The ragdoll side helped ensure that she did not put herself in scary, dangerous situations where she could be hurt. In her room, on her chair, she was safe. Furthermore, the ragdoll served as a counterbalance to the unrelenting, hard-driving taskmaster.

The drill sergeant, on the other hand, saw her task as motivating and disciplining the lazy ragdoll. The stiffness and rigidity were necessary to compensate for the passive lifelessness of the ragdoll.

What is important in such an exercise is to show the client that the parts of herself that she hates are in fact trying to be helpful to her. Each mode is seeking to control the world in a way that it believes serves the client's best interest. They may not be effective, but clients can learn from them what their needs are, then move to higher-level means of control (Quadrants 1 and 2) in order to meet those needs.

Joyce saw her positive assertive self as a judge in robes seated behind a high desk in a courtroom, with a confident, amused smile. Quadrant 2, posi-



tive yielding, emerged as a puppy playing with children, a little cocker spaniel who was warm, loving, and accepting of all people. The interaction between these two modes was quite positive. In one scenario, the judge felt exasperated and hassled, but when the puppy came into the court room, the judge lightened up and was able to listen more carefully to the case before her. The puppy, in turn, had no fear of the judge, and treated her as playfully and affectionately as anyone else.

What saved the judge from becoming the tyrannical rigid executive was the playful puppy. Conversely, the judge gave direction and authority to the puppy.

It is important for us to help our clients understand that these four representations exist in everyone. Which one of the two negative quadrants do they fear most? Are they more apprehensive of their passivity or their aggressiveness?

Some of these views may be related to traditional gender stereotypes. When a woman acts assertive and confident (Quadrant 1), some may perceive her as too aggressive and overcontrolling (Quadrant 3). When a man acts gentle and accommodating (Quadrant 2), some may perceive him as being too passive or wimpy (Quadrant 4).

A critical task in moving toward optimal control is to help clients learn more about themselves and their style of gaining a sense of control. What is their predominant, or natural, mode? What is their view of the two negative modes? How can we help them move beyond the negative modes to realize an integrated combination of both change and harmony? The final line of the poem cited in Chapter 2 is "the wisdom to know the difference." Wisdom comes in part from having the skills of both positive modes, recognizing the dark or shadow aspects of each, and learning to accept and then channel the negative sides into healthy, positive modes.

## AGENCY OF CONTROL

In this section two types of problems related to agency are described: too little belief in one's self and too much. Optimal control with agency involves: being able to gain a sense of control from both self *and* other as agent, knowing how to integrate and balance self and other as agent, and having a sensitivity to both situational appropriateness and developmental issues in such integration and balance.

In Chapter 4, we pointed out that part of the suboptimal control profile involves not believing in oneself and one's abilities. This problem can be seen in patients with both depression and dependent personality disorder. These individuals, high in the negative yielding mode of control, tend to

rely on others to an unhealthy degree for support, acknowledgment, and validation, and experience a feeling of loss of control when they perceive such support to be absent.

However, there are also problems with too much belief in oneself. Individuals who are high on negative assertive control tend to evidence an overreliance on self to gain a sense of control. They take on too much personal responsibility, believe that they are (or should be) indispensable causal agents everywhere. (As a Ziggy cartoon observed: "No, your sneezing did not cause the hole in the ozone layer.") They typically find it difficult to ask for help from others, to delegate, and to let go of their personal need to be in charge. This overreliance on self as the source of control may come from past success experiences that are inappropriately generalized, from fears of being or appearing vulnerable (i.e., needing help from others being seen as a sign of weakness), or from an inability to trust others. While too much belief in one's ability to control through self as agent is not considered pathological in U.S. culture, we contend that self as agent, as well as pride in self-agency, often causes trouble, as reflected in the following parable:

A samurai warrior came to a Zen master for instruction: "Master, I would like to know if Heaven and Hell really exist"

The teacher heard the request and broke into mocking laughter. "You would like to know about Heaven and Hell?! . . . Don't be ridiculous! Just look at you: you're fat, you're uneducated, and you're uncouth! What teacher in his right mind would invest his time in the likes of you?! Go back to your camp and practice your silly exercises!" With that the teacher turned his back on the man and ignored him.

The samurai became enraged. His face turned red, he began to breathe heavily, and he drew his sword, ready to chop off the master's head with his next breath. Just as the sword was about to fall, the master turned around smoothly and calmly told him "That, sir, is hell."

The samurai stopped cold and realized the profundity of the master's teaching. He saw instantly how he had created his own hell through pride and anger. Immediately, he fell at the master's feet in humble reverence.

The master looked down at him, lifted the samurai's head, and quietly said "And that, sir, is heaven." (Cohen, 1993 p. 154)

#### SENSE OF CONTROL FROM BOTH SELF AND OTHER

Just as psychological health is reflected in a balanced, flexible, and integrated use of both modes of control, so too is it dependent on the client's ability to gain a sense of control both from himself or herself and from others. In the Samurai and Zen master parable, the lesson for the warrior was to learn to harness his egoic pride and surrender his ego to another. For other individuals, however, such surrender could represent unhealthy dependence. Gandhi commented that often those individuals who were at-

tracted to his nonviolent satyagraha (truth force) were the wrong people (Teixeria, 1987). He wanted people with fire in their belly, who were self-reliant and energetic. But often people who wished to be his followers were passive, lacking trust in their own abilities.

Along the same lines, Jung (1973) noted the importance of patient responsibility:

Any of my pupils could give you so much understanding and insight that you could treat yourself . . . In the last resort, every individual alone has to win his battle, nobody else can do it for him. (p. 126)

At first glance, Jung seemed to be emphasizing self-efforts alone. However, a more careful reading shows that Jung was talking about his pupils giving the patient understanding and insight within the context of therapy. Both other's assistance and individual efforts are required, again suggesting the need for balance and integration between self and other agency.

Clients can learn to utilize the assertive and yielding modes of control with assistance both from self and other agency. Gaining a sense of control through assertive strategies can involve self-initiated efforts to change oneself or one's situation. However, others can also be an important source of support. For example, an individual who decides she wants to gain more control over her level of physical fitness many enlist the help of friends through asking for positive encouragement as well as actually having them join her in exercise activities to provide peer support. Or a person might ask for help from a higher power or family to be more assertive in communicating needs to others or making other changes in his life.

Similarly, one can gain a sense of control in the positive yielding mode through either self or other efforts. For example, one can practice self-initiated cognitions to relax, to be less controlling and more accepting of others. Or others can be a source of control in developing the positive yielding mode (e.g., obtaining guidance and support from a therapist to learn yielding skills or placing oneself in another's hands, as in the story of the samurai warrior). Religious and spiritual beliefs in a higher power—a benevolent, sacred universe—can also provide individuals with a sense of control, enabling them to let go and trust that events have meaning and purpose. What appears important is less who is in control, but that there is *someone* in control. For those who exclusively rely on self as their source of control, it is important to recognize that others *can* be a positive source of support and control as well.

#### INTEGRATION AMONG SELF AND OTHER AGENCY

In our teaching and clinical work, we often use the story of Odysseus to illustrate an important point about the integration of self and other agency.

Homer described Odysseus' preparation to navigate the bewitching effects of the sirens, whose lulling sounds inevitably caused sailors to steer toward them and crash their ships on the rocks. Knowing this, he had his oarsmen tie him to the mast and place wax in their own ears. We ask our students/clients whether this action represents self-control? Why or why not?

Those who say no argue that Odysseus doesn't have either the personal skill or discipline to handle the sirens' call. Those who argue that he is demonstrating self-control say he has awareness of the situation and his limitations, has a clear goal, exercises a conscious choice about how to proceed toward his goal, and takes responsibility for both his limitations and his actions. Recall the six dimensions of control we discussed in Chapter 3—awareness, choice, responsibility, goal, discipline, and skill—as building blocks that underlie all human control strategies. Although all six are needed, they do not necessarily all have to come solely through self-agency. Odysseus has four of them. He is aware of what he doesn't have—skill and discipline—and therefore asks for help from others. The Shapiro Control Inventory (SCI) notes in which of these six dimensions the client feels deficient, and where there are strengths. It is then up to the client and therapist to build on the strengths and see what combination of self and other agency are needed to address those dimensions where concerns exist (cf. Appendix C).

## SENSE OF CONTROL

In this section, we begin by highlighting and summarizing some of the problems that can occur when a person has a sense of control. We then address the values question Control toward what? to see how optimal sense of control requires a conscious choice of goals. In so doing, we show how reaching these goals involves a blending and integration across the life cycle of self and other as agent, assertive and yielding modes, and modulation of affect regarding desire for control, if too high, too low, or inappropriately directed.

Individuals' normal sense of control involves an exaggerated belief about their ability to exercise control. These illusions of control can distort reality and lead to unrealistic, inappropriate expectations and an unhealthy degree of unfounded optimism. Further, people often gain a sense of control through the use of defensive strategies, such as denial and external attribution, designed to protect the self when they are not behaviorally competent or feel their identity threatened. A sense of control gained in this way can limit the ability to recognize aspects of one self or the environment that need to be altered or addressed in some way, resulting in a failure to develop and grow. Finally, sense of control is often based on a low-level

awareness of the extent to which biological reflexes and cultural conditioning affect attitudes, cognitions, and behavior.

#### FREE CHOICE: CONSCIOUSNESS AS CAUSAL

As noted in Chapters 2 and 4, clients are experiencing merely an illusion of control, and not true free choice, if they are only reflexively and reactively following biological/cultural conditioning. Therefore, part of gaining optimal control involves recognizing the biological and cultural factors that may be influencing choices. It is important to observe desires, modes, and agency of control. Where does the client seek to gain greater control? Why? What mode does the client feel is best to gain a sense of control, and what source or agent of control does he or she normally prefer? Why? When biology or culture exerts a pull in a given direction, is that necessarily the direction in which the client wants or ideally should go?

Recall from Chapter 2 our Postulate 3.3:

Although there are biological and environmental influences on behavior, humans can learn, through attentional training and values clarification, to exercise choice through both self-control and environmental control.

Attentional training involves cultivating greater awareness of mental habits and reflexive, habitual, oftentimes unconscious normal control strategies and goals. Transformation begins with understanding and accepting these thoughts, feelings, and experiences in an unedited way.

Once this starting point is accepted, conscious choice is then possible, cultivated through the development of ethical principles and values, forethought, and moral reasoning (Sperry, 1988). By having awareness of desires, the skills of both modes, the ability to use agency from self and other, and a consciously chosen goal of where to direct desire for control (over self or other), the foundational prerequisites exist for an optimal control profile.

With these capacities, it is possible to develop and practice higher levels of effective choices and wisdom regarding control-related goals, desires, and strategies. In so doing, clients—as well as each of us—can learn to consciously control the quest for control, rather than being biologically and reflexively controlled by it.

#### VALUES: CONTROL TOWARD WHAT?

To address the question Control toward what? it is necessary to posit values—the goal toward which control efforts should be directed (Allport, 1955; Kan-

fer, 1979; Maslow, 1968). Personal values require philosophical assumptions of consciousness (Claxton, 1994; Tart, 1972, 1975a, b; Walsh, 1980), a self with the ability to choose, (Sampson, 1985; Viney, 1969), and free will (Furlong, 1981; Howard & Conway, 1986). Such concepts have been considered as epiphenomena—and hence outside the realm of legitimate scientific inquiry—by radical behaviorists arguing environmental determinism, and biological reductionists arguing genetic inheritance. However, without conscious examination of the goals of control, those goals will be determined by biological needs, the techniques themselves, or unexamined cultural mores (Albee, 1986; Bergin, 1991; D. Campbell, 1975; Heath, 1983; H. Smith, 1965, 1982; Nolan, 1972; Shapiro, 1983c; Sperry, 1977; Tart, 1979; Woolfolk & Richardson, 1984).

Conceptualizing the role control plays in creating positive mental health involves looking beyond current scientific fact. As Einstein (1956) wrote, science studies what is, not what can be. Further, as noted Allport (1955) stated we need to investigate the “ought”—where psychology can help take us. And, Maslow (1968) challenged us to investigate the “farther potentials of the human.”

When should individuals exercise self-control and when should they attempt to exercise control over their social and physical world (Smith, 1965; Walsh, 1984)? In affluent societies, self-control may need to be directed toward delay of gratification (Mischel, 1974). We additionally suggest (in what some may consider an equally culturally and politically bound view) that self-control efforts may also involve relinquishing this culture’s social/economic emphasis on the need for material acquisition as a sign of self-worth and competence (Elgin, 1981). Further, we believe that at some point developmentally, the focus of control efforts must go beyond goals of personal competence, autonomous self-identity, and positive ego development (Walsh & Vaughan, 1994). Such control efforts should also be directed toward generativity, compassionate service for healing others, and interpersonal and collective well-being (Fowler, 1981; Kohlberg, 1981; Levenson, 1978; Maslow, 1968; Shapiro, 1983; Tart, 1986; Walsh & Vaughan, 1994; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984).

#### RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS/PERENNIAL WISDOM

Mainstream psychology has an unstated operating assumption that the universe is random and indifferent (Bergin, 1991; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin, 1996; Woolfolk, 1984). To take one example, Ellis (1962, 1984) acknowledged that his theory of cognitive mediation of emotional responses has origins in the stoic philosophers, as well as Taoist and Buddhist philosophies. But he also ignores the context of these traditions and make his theory (RET) value free (1962, 1984): “the frank and honest goal of RET is quite hedonistic: longer life and greater enjoyment.”

Religious traditions, regardless of whether one believes the metaphysical or ontological reality they posit, have been quite explicit in identifying values toward which individuals should aspire. When giving his APA presidential address, Donald Campbell (1975) noted: "On these issues [as to how people should live their lives] psychology and psychiatry cannot yet claim to be truly scientific and thus have special reasons for modesty and caution in undermining traditional [religious] belief systems (p. 1105).

#### CONTROLLING THE INTERNAL WORLD

The perennial wisdom of various philosophical and religious traditions suggests the importance of self-control and self-discipline. One aspect of this discipline of self-control is how one responds to adversity and external events. For example, there is a story of a ruthless samurai soldier who meets a Zen monk. The monk does not bow, and the soldier says, "What, don't you know who I am? I am the one who can run you through with my sword without blinking."

The Monk replies, "Ah, you do not know who I am. I am the one who can be run through by your sword without blinking."

Control is also discussed in the ancient Indian text, the Bhagavad Gita, where the person of wisdom is described as one who has not a hair's breadth between will (what he wants to do) and action (what he does). This is a profound statement of what is involved in true self-control. First, clarity of goals and values is required. Second, manifesting those goals and values in all areas of life is needed (e.g., what one eats, what one says, what one thinks, how one acts).

Toynbee (1965) asked and answered: "Who are . . . the greatest benefactors of the living generation of mankind? I should say: Confucius and Lao-tzu, the Buddha, the prophets of Israel and Judah, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammed, and Socrates" (p. 6). These individuals all taught the importance of internal self-control. It has become increasingly clear that humans' technological advances over the past 2,500 years involving understanding and control over the external world have not yet been matched by the ability to understand and control the internal world of thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and emotions. The lessons of religion and psychology must continue to be refined and explored to help ensure those internal advances.

#### BALANCING THE MODES

A second control-related area discussed in the perennial wisdom traditions is the importance of balancing the two modes of control. The positive assertive mode involves trying to make changes, both in oneself and in the

world to achieve what might be called “the promised” land—our ideal goal. In mythological stories, this is the myth of “arrival” through heroic efforts and accomplishment. Yet, in many ways, the goal of arrival is ever-elusive. Like Moses in the Bible, the promised land is always over the next hill, seen but never reached.

Therefore, a second myth involves focus on the journey itself—an appreciation and acceptance of the here and now (Quadrant 2, positive yielding), living with integrity on a day to day basis: “Birth is a beginning, Death is a destination, Life is a journey: We go from defeat to defeat, until looking backward or ahead, we see that victory lies not at some high place along the way, but in having made the journey, stage by stage, a sacred pilgrimage” (Stern, 1984).

Furthermore, the myth of arrival can be integrated with the myth of the journey. “We can learn to enjoy what *is* (Quadrant 2, positive yielding) while seeking our treasures (Quadrant 1, Positive assertive). . . .” (Murphy, 1972, p. 128).

The Bhagavad Gita (1964) discusses this integration of doing *and* being, setting goals *and* being, setting goals *and* appreciating and accepting the here and now:

who sees inaction in action [i.e., can keep calm and centered while undertaking assertive action]  
and action in inaction, [i.e., can sit still and yet feel the beauty of actions of the living body]  
he is enlightened among men—he does all actions disciplined (Chapter 4, p. 25).

The Bhagavad Gita also advises that when individuals take assertive action (Quadrant 1), they need to learn to become “non-attached to the fruits of their actions” (Quadrant 2), cultivating equanimity about the outcome.

Through learning these lessons, individuals can

- Stay centered (Quadrant 2) without being passive (Quadrant 4), and maintain an enthusiastic goal-oriented focus (Quadrant 1) without unnecessary tension and competition (Quadrant 3).
- Make concerted efforts toward self-change (Quadrant 1) while maintaining a gentle compassionate attitude toward self and others (Quadrant 2) even when efforts do not completely succeed.

#### LEVELS OF CONTROL: TOWARD OPENING THE HEART

The perennial religious traditions also posit the value of service and giving to others, balancing self-interest with a sensitivity to the rights and needs of



others (Shapiro, 1992). Potok, in his book *My Name is Asher Lev*, (Potok, 1972) offers a model which connects control to this act of service and giving: opening the heart to others,

He comments that the lowest level of control is exhibited by the person "who sins, has evil thoughts, whose efforts to live a good life are an endless struggle—most of us are in that category" (p. 79). The next higher level is the person whose "acts are without fault but who cannot control his thinking—very few achieve that high level" (ibid). Finally he says, those at the highest level "have control over their hearts" (ibid).

To achieve a balanced, integrated, and optimal sense of control requires that individuals learn to:

- Systematically observe their mind—perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, reactions; and through this greater awareness, learn to see the extent of their conditioning.
- Acknowledge, take responsibility for, and accept their feelings, (e.g., not punish themselves for anger, fear, jealousy, cravings). As the psychological truism suggests "What we resist, persists." Individuals can learn to meet and then befriend these feelings, neither blaming others for them ("he made me angry"), running from them, nor grabbing them, but rather just observing them with equanimity. As the Buddhist teacher Anguttara Nikaya commented "I know of nothing which brings joy as does a tamed, controlled, attended and restrained heart."
- Recognize the opportunity to pause and choose whether to change or modify reactions and habits; to notice instances of too much as well as too little control.
- Work on letting go of unwholesome states through forgiveness and acceptance (Quadrant 2), or on changing and addressing them by channeling the negative effect of self-defeating fear, anger, and craving into positive action (Quadrant 1).

In so doing, individuals can learn to develop a greater sense of control in both the inner and outer worlds. Potok is suggesting that all individuals with practice can learn to control their behavior to a certain extent. With greater practice still, most can learn to control negative emotions so that they at least do not express them inappropriately. Many, with still greater practice and self-discipline, can learn to tame, reduce, and transform their negative affect itself, and let their actions and behavior be guided only by a disciplined, compassionate, and open heart.