



Preface

This book first took shape in my mind as little more than a critical survey of contemporary psychotechnology. By that I mean that I was originally intending to review some of the material tools and techniques that have lately become available for measuring and controlling the thoughts and feelings and actions of human beings. There was at the time—indeed there still is—a tendency for writings on the subject to reflect a narrow disciplinary perspective. Hence, there had been books written on the uses of drugs, on behavioral conditioning methods, and on psychosurgery (to name just a few of the many pertinent areas of recent activity). But most of these dealt with matters that were mainly technical, and no one had explored the idea, which seemed to me quite reasonable, that there were certain common denominators to be found beneath the many superficial dissimilarities among the diverse forms of psychotechnology.

My interest in the subject of “behavioral control” had been stimulated around 1970 by the appearance of some evidently serious proposals aimed at the development and deployment of supposedly sophisticated scientific solutions to some of the pressing social problems facing American society. As most readers will remember, there had been a long period of social unrest in the nation during the Indochina war, and in the months and years immediately following the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, there were riots in many cities and uprisings in a number of the nation’s prisons. During that period psychotechnologists were occasionally to be found promoting their own activities as a source of solutions to the problem of violence control. To cite just one noteworthy example, public officials and prison authorities began to receive and look favorably upon proposals to use psychosurgery as a means of “treating” allegedly uncontrollable ghetto residents and prison inmates.

Nor were these mere isolated incidents. At the time I was serving as a member of a scientific review committee that had been organized by the National Institutes of Mental Health of the Public Health Service for the purpose of making recommendations for the support of research in my own field of scientific specialization—neuropsychology. As public apprehension over the prevalence and severity of social violence increased, so did the frequency with which our panel was asked to review various proposals for psychotechnological forms of violence control. It seemed to me at the time (as indeed it still does) that such proposals, although doubtless well intended, were conceptually very muddled and socially very misleading. I found myself vaguely troubled by the idea of attempting to reduce what appeared to be a social problem to the status of a medical one, but I was unable to define my own feelings in more clear-cut, conceptual terms.

In an attempt to clarify my own thoughts on the matter, I began to look somewhat more closely at the arguments that were used to justify

the proposals in ostensibly scientific terms. What I repeatedly found was that the scientific foundations were generally nonexistent. As I began to search farther afield in other branches of psychotechnology, it seemed to me that I was encountering a recurrent pattern in which many different kinds of proposals were being couched in essentially equivalent underlying forms. It was then that I began to realize that there was need for an inquiry that would penetrate beneath the superficial conceptual and material details of contemporary behavior control technology, one that would search out the deeper questions of fact and value that make psychotechnology so often and so intensely controversial. Accordingly, I undertook to provide a description of psychotechnology in terms of the broader social context of contemporary American society.

But, after having written the book, I find that it is much broader in its intent and coverage than that. Indeed, what it attempts to provide is a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding some commonly overlooked or misunderstood aspects of the interplay of science, technology, and society. It attempts to show that in order to understand the controversies that surround so much of psychotechnology today, it is first necessary to recognize and overcome some confused and confusing ideas about the supposedly objective and value-free nature of psychotechnological methods of procedure. As it happens, this entails a broadening of the inquiry to include a search for some causes and consequences of a state of severe conceptual fragmentation that exists in psychological science and technology.

In the spirit of scientific inquiry of which it is intended to be a part, my analysis of psychotechnology consists in large measure of an attempt to demonstrate the existence of regular and lawful connections among things and events that appear at first glance to be separate, distinct, and unrelated. What I have tried to show in broad historical terms is that psychotechnology can be understood as the product of a recurrent social process in which certain classes of ideas and practices systematically interact.

The ideas in question turn out to be, for the most part, ideas about what is commonly called "human nature," that is to say, about what it *means* to be a specifically human being. The practices in question include multifarious methods of procedure (including the methods of modern psychotechnology) with which it is possible to control human behavior. As the subtitle of the volume is intended to suggest, my central contention is that there is, and always has been, a connection between efforts to define the *meaning* of human nature and efforts to exercise the *power* of behavior control. And in order to understand the fundamental character of that connection, it is necessary to understand the character of the broader social context of which these interrelated efforts are a part.

Speaking most generally, what I have tried to do is to show that the interplay of meaning and power is a constant feature of human social existence and that its analysis in any given instance entails the tracing of connections between conceptual and material factors that tend to reflect and reinforce the interests and objectives of relatively powerful individuals and groups. Psychotechnology turns out to be comprehensible only as part of a broader social process in which connections between the meaning of human nature and the power of behavior control alternate and overlap and interpenetrate and combine to determine the texture of the whole. It is a process in which controversies about psychotechnology commonly turn out to be controversies about the efforts of some people to regulate the conduct of other people. Accordingly, in undertaking to write a broad historical account of psychotechnology, it has been necessary for me to focus upon meaning and power as two aspects of a continuous and continuing social struggle between contending social forces. The scale of the work had necessarily to be large in order to show that many seemingly disparate instances are merely variations on a recurrent basic theme and in order to demonstrate that things now going on have been going on since antiquity.

My debts to others are at least as numerous as the authors I have read and as deep as the help I have received from scores of friends and colleagues. The notes at the end of the book acknowledge many of the sources I have consulted and make plain, I hope, that others are exempt from blame for any erroneous uses to which I may have inadvertently put their ideas. This work has been in progress for so long and has benefited so much from the contributions and criticisms of so many that I can here only thank a few whose contributions were particularly important to me at various points along the way. Joseph Hunt, Geri Atkins, and Aase Huggins were part of the creative process from the start. Without their support and encouragement, the entire effort would have been abandoned long ago, and I can hardly begin to distinguish their ideas about psychotechnology from those I would call my own. Charlie Gross, Helen Mahut, Maria-Grazia Marzot, Harold Bronk, Dan and Carol Goodenough, Al and Ele Corkland, Martin and Joan Sokoloff, John and Lori Williams, Steven J. Gould, and Steven Rose read all or part of the manuscript in various stages. I cannot claim to have incorporated all of their criticisms but all of them helped me immeasurably to clarify my ideas. The final editing was done by Joan Rosenstock. Her skill as a weaver of words and ideas helped to reduce a very long manuscript to more manageable and readable proportion.

Over the years, I have been fortunate to have known and worked closely with a large number of exceptionally gifted teachers and students.

Among these none have been more important to my own intellectual development than two who are now departed, Hans-Lukas Teuber and John Asinari.

To write a book is to strain, and yet somehow to strengthen, the bonds of intimacy upon which so much of life depends. My children Nora, Jon, and Katya have understood my need for solitude and have given me much cause to rejoice in their faith that “it” would someday be finished. My wife Beatrice is responsible for many of the ideas that are contained herein. In particular I owe to her the notion that behavior is meaningful only in terms of its context. Her love has been my context and my contentment. Her presence is on every page.