Theoretical Perspectives

People have always striven to control the events that affect their lives. By exerting influence in spheres over which they can command some control, they are better able to realize desired futures and to forestall undesired ones. In primitive times, when people had a limited understanding of the world around them and few ways to alter its workings, they appealed to supernatural agents who were believed to wield control over their lives. People practiced elaborate rituals and codes of conduct in an attempt to gain favor from, or protection against, supernatural powers. Even in contemporary life, when faced with weighty matters of much uncertainty, many people employ superstitious rituals to sway outcomes in their favor. A few instances in which an irrelevant ritual happened to be accompanied by a successful outcome can easily make people believe that the ritual affected the outcome.

The growth of knowledge over the course of human history greatly enhanced people's ability to predict events and to exercise control over them. Belief in supernatural systems of control gave way to conceptions that acknowledged people's power to shape their own destiny. This change in human self-conception and the view of life from supernatural control to personal control ushered in a major shift in causal thinking, and the new enlightenment rapidly expanded the exercise of human power over more and more domains. Human ingenuity and endeavor supplanted conciliating rituals to deities as the way to change the conditions of life. By drawing on their knowledge, people built physical technologies that drastically altered how they lived their daily lives. They developed biological technologies to alter the genetic makeup of animals and plants. They created medical and psychosocial technologies to improve the quality of their physical and emotional lives. They devised social systems that placed constraints on the types of beliefs and conduct that could be subjected to coercive or punitive institutional control. These entitlements and institutional protections expanded freedom of belief and action.

The striving for control over life circumstances permeates almost everything people do throughout
the life course because it provides innumerable personal and social benefits. Uncertainty in important matters is highly unsettling. To the extent that people help to bring about significant outcomes, they are better able to predict them. Predictability fosters adaptive preparedness. The inability to exert influence over things that adversely affect one’s life breeds apprehension, apathy, or despair. The ability to secure desired outcomes and to prevent undesired ones, therefore, provides a powerful incentive for the development and exercise of personal control. The more people bring their influence to bear on events in their lives, the more they can shape them to their liking. By selecting and creating environmental supports for what they want to become, they contribute to the direction their lives take. Human functioning is, of course, embedded in social conditions. The environmental supports for valued life paths, therefore, are created both individually and in concert with others. Through collective action, people can improve their lives by modifying the character and practices of their social systems.

The human capacity to exercise control is a mixed blessing. The impact of personal efficacy on the quality of life depends on the purposes to which it is put. For example, the lives of innovators and social reformers driven by unshakable efficacy are not easy ones. They are often the objects of derision, condemnation, and persecution, even though societies eventually benefit from their persevering efforts. Many people who gain recognition and fame shape their lives by overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles, only to be catapulted into new social realities over which they have less control and manage badly. Indeed, the annals of the famous and infamous are strewed with individuals who were both architects and victims of their life courses.

The vastly enhanced human power to transform the environment can have pervasive effects not only on current life but also on future generations. Many technologies that provide current benefits also entail hazards that can take a heavy toll on the environment. Our technical capability to destroy or render uninhabitable much of the planet attests to the growing magnitude of human power. There is much public concern over where some of the technologies we create are leading us. Voracious pursuit of self-interest produces effects that collectively can be harmful to society in the long run. The exercise of social power that places individual interest above the common good creates special interest gridlock that immobilizes efforts to solve the broader problems of society. Without commitment, to common purposes that transcend narrow self-interests, the exercise of control can degenerate into personal and factional power conflicts. People must work together if they are to realize the shared destiny they desire and preserve a habitable environment for generations to come. In short, the capacity for human control can be exercised for good or ill.

Because control is central in human lives, many theories about it have been proposed over the years. People’s level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true. Hence, it is people’s belief in their causative capabilities that is the major focus of inquiry. Most theories are couched in terms of an inborn drive for control. Any capability that is widely beneficial—and, thus, highly prevalent—is quickly interpreted as an inborn drive for self-determination or mastery. Theories that contend that striving for personal control is an expression of an innate drive to encourage interest in how human efficacy is developed, because people allegedly come fully equipped with it. Instead, such theories dwell heavily on how the drive is socially thwarted and weakened. The fact that virtually all people try to bring at least some influence to bear on some of the things that affect them does not necessarily indicate the presence of an innate motivator.

Nor is control sought as an end in itself. Exercise of control that secures desired outcomes and wards off undesired ones has immense functional value and provides a strong source of incentive motivation. The issue of whether the exercise of control is pushed by an inborn drive or pulled by anticipated benefits will be given considerable attention later.

People make causal contributions to their own psychosocial functioning through mechanisms of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy. Unless people believe they
can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act. Efficacy belief, therefore, is a major basis of action. People guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. The events over which personal influence is exercised vary widely, however. Influence may entail regulating one’s own motivation, thought processes, affective states, and actions, or it may involve changing environmental conditions, depending on what one seeks to manage.

People’s beliefs in their efficacy have diverse effects. Such beliefs influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-harming or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize. This chapter examines the nature of human agency and alternative conceptions of personal causation.

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THE NATURE OF HUMAN AGENCY

People can exercise influence over what they do. Most human behavior, of course, is determined by many interacting factors, and so people are contributors to, rather than the sole determiners of, what happens to them. The power to make things happen should be distinguished from the mechanics of how things are made to happen. For example, in pursuing a particular strategy in an athletic contest, the players do not tell their nervous system to get the motor neurons to move their skeletal musculature in designated patterns. Based on their understanding of what is within the power of humans to do and beliefs about their own capabilities, people try to generate courses of action to suit given purposes without having the foggiest notion of how their choices orchestrate the neurophysiological events subserving the endeavor.

In evaluating the role of intentionality in human agency, one must distinguish between the personal production of action for an intended outcome and the effects that carrying out that course of action actually produce. Agency refers to acts done intentionally. Thus, a person who smashed a set of precariously displayed dishes in a china shop upon being tripped by another shopper would not be considered the agent of the event. Davidson (1971) reminds us, however, that actions intended to serve a certain purpose can cause quite different things to happen. He cites the example of the melancholic Hamlet, who intentionally stabbed the man behind a tapestry who he believed to be the king, only to discover, much to his horror, that he had killed Polonius, the wrong person. The killing of the hidden person was intentional, but the wrong victim was done in. Effects are not the characteristics of agentive acts; they are the consequences of them. Many actions are performed in the belief that they will bring about a desired outcome, but they actually produce outcomes that were neither intended nor wanted. For example, it is not uncommon for people to contribute to their own misery through intentional transgressive acts spawned by gross miscalculation of consequences. Some of the social practices and policies that cause harm were originally designed and implemented with well-meaning intent; their harmful effects were unforeseen. In short, the power to originate actions for given purposes is the key feature of personal agency. Whether the exercise of that agency has beneficial or detrimental effects or produces unintended consequences is another matter.

Beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the key factor of human agency. If people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen. In social cognitive theory, a sense of personal efficacy is represented as propositional beliefs. We will see later that these beliefs are embedded in a network of functional relationships with other factors that operate together in the management of different realities. The fact that beliefs are described in the language of mind raises
The theoretical perspectives of ontological reductionism and the plurality of regulatory systems. Mental events are brain activities, not immaterial entities existing apart from neural systems. Were one to perform Bunge's (1980) hypothetical brain transplant, the donor's unique psychic life would undoubtedly accompany the brain to the new host, rather than remain behind with the donor as a mental entity in a separate realm. Physicality does not imply reductionism, however. Thought processes are emergent brain activities that are not ontologically reducible. In his treatise on the paradigmatic shift to cognitivism, Sperry (1993) spells out some of the characteristics of a nondualistic mentalism. Mental states are emergent properties of generating brain processes. Emergent properties differ in novel ways from the elements of which they are created, rather than simply representing increased complexity of the same properties. To use Bunge's (1977) analogy, the emergent properties of water, such as fluidity, viscosity, and transparency, are not simply the aggregate properties of its microcomponents, oxygen and hydrogen.

Thought processes are not only emergent brain activities; they also exert determinative influence. There are many neural systems that subserve human functioning. They operate interactively at different sites and levels to produce coherent experiences out of the multitude of information processing. With regard to this ontological plurality, certain brain structures are specialized for mentation. The thought processes generated by the higher cerebral system are involved in the regulation of visceral, motoric, and other lower level subsystems. For example, a host of microsensory, perceptual, and information processing activities give rise to a judgment of personal efficacy. Once formed, however, efficacy beliefs regulate aspirations, choice of behavioral courses, mobilization and maintenance of effort, and affective reactions. The influence between microevents and emergent macroevents operates both upwardly and downwardly. Thus, an emergent interactive agency assumes ontological nonreductionism of complex events to simpler ones and plurality of regulatory physical subsystems that function interconnectedly in a hierarchically structured system in which higher neural centers control lower ones.

The fact that cognition is a cerebral occurrence does not mean that the laws expressing functional relations in psychological theory are reducible to those in neurophysiological theory. One must distinguish between how cerebral systems function and the personal and social means by which they can be orchestrated to produce courses of action that serve different purposes. Much of psychology is concerned with discovering principles about how to structure environmental influences and enlist cognitive activities to promote human adaptation and change. Most of the subject matter of psychological theory with regard to psychosocial factors does not have a counterpart in neurobiological theory and, therefore, is not derivable from it. These factors do not appear in neurophysiological theory because many of them involve the construction and organization of events external to the organism. For example, knowledge of the brain circuitry involved in learning does not tell one much about how best to devise conditions of learning in terms of levels of abstractness, novelty, and challenge; how to provide incentives to get people to attend to, process, and organize relevant information; in what modes to present information; and whether learning is better achieved independently, cooperatively, or competitively. The optimal conditions must be specified by psychological principles. Nor does understanding how the brain works furnish rules on how to create efficacious parents, teachers, or politicians. Although psychological principles cannot violate the neurophysiological capabilities of the systems that subserve them, the psychological principles need to be pursued in their own right. Were one to embark on the road to reductionism, the journey would traverse biology and chemistry and would eventually end in atomic particles, with neither the intermediate locales nor the final stop suppling the psychological laws of human behavior.

A major challenge for a physicalistic account of the mind is to specify the mechanisms through which the brain creates mental events and explain how these events exert determinative influence. The human mind is generative, creative,
and proactive, not just reactive. Hence, an even more formidable challenge is to explain how people come to be producers of thoughts that may be novel, inventive, or visionary or that take complete leave of reality, as in flights of fancy. One can intentionally originate novel coherent thoughts; for example, visualizing hippopotami attired in chartreuse tuxedos gracefully navigating hang gliders over lunar craters. Similarly, one can conceive of several novel acts and choose to execute one of them. People bring cognitive productions into being by the intentional exercise of personal agency. Intentionality and agency raise the fundamental question of how people actuate the cerebral processes that characterize the exercise of agency and lead to the realization of particular intentions. This question goes beyond the cerebral correlates of sensory input and motor output to the intentional production of cerebral events in thinking of future courses of action, evaluating their likely functional value under differing circumstances, and organizing and guiding the execution of the chosen options. Cognitive production, with its purposive, creative, and evaluative properties, defies explanation of novel thoughts in terms of external cueing of preformed cognitions. In addition to the question of how people bring about thoughts and actions is the intriguing question of how people generate self-perceiving, self-reflecting, and self-correcting activities.

Rothschild (1985) presents a thoughtful analysis of human agency operating through intentional and generative cognition as it bears on the nonintentionalist views of human behavior favored by eliminative materialists. People are agentic operators in their life course not just onlooking hosts of brain mechanisms orchestrated by environmental events. The sensory, motor and cerebral systems are tools people use to accomplish the tasks and goals that give meaning and direction to their lives (Harré & Gillet, 1994). Through their intentional acts, people shape the functional structure of their neurobiological systems. By regulating their own motivation and the activities they pursue, they produce the experiences that form the neurobiological substrate of symbolic, psychomotor, and other skills. Should people experience any loss or decline in any of their bodily systems, they devise alternative ways of engaging and managing the world around them.

The duality of self as agent and self as object pervades much of the theorizing in the field of personality. The double nature of the self merges in the case of self-influence. In their daily transactions, people analyze the situations that confront them, consider alternative courses of action, judge their abilities to carry them out successfully, and estimate the results the actions are likely to produce. They act on their judgments, later reflect on how well their thoughts have served them in managing the events at hand, and change their thinking and strategies accordingly. People are said to be agents when they act on the environment but objects when they reflect and act on themselves.

Social cognitive theory rejects the dualistic view of the self. Reflecting on one's own functioning entails shifting the perspective of the same agent rather than converting the self from agent to object or reifying different internal agents or selves that regulate one another. It is one and the same person who does the strategic thinking about how to manage the environment and later evaluates the adequacy of his or her knowledge, thinking skills, capabilities, and action strategies. The shift in perspective does not transform the person from an agent to an object, as the dualist view of the self would lead one to believe. One is just as much an agent when one is reflecting on one's experiences and exerting self-influence as when one is executing courses of action. In social cognitive theory, the self is not split into agent and object; rather, in self-reflection and self-influence, individuals are simultaneously agent and object.

HUMAN AGENCY IN TRIADIC RECIPROCAL CAUSATION

The term causation is used in the present context to mean functional dependence between events. In social cognitive theory, human agency operates
within an interdependent causal structure involving triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986a). In this transactional view of self and society, internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events; behavior; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally (Fig. 1.1). Reciprocity does not mean that the three sets of interacting determinants are of equal strength. Their relative influence will vary for different activities and under different circumstances. Nor do the mutual influences and their reciprocal effects all spring forth simultaneously as a holistic entity. It takes time for a causal factor to exert its influence. Because of the time lag in the operation of the three sets of factors, it is possible to gain an understanding of how different segments of reciprocal causation operate without having to mount a Herculean effort to assess every possible interactant at the same time.

Human adaptation and change are rooted in social systems. Therefore, personal agency operates within a broad network of sociostructural influences. In agentic transactions, people are both producers and products of social systems. Social structures—which are devised to organize, guide, and regulate human affairs in given domains by authorized rules and sanctions—do not arise by immaculate conception; they are created by human activity. Social structures, in turn, impose constraints and provide resources for personal development and everyday functioning. But neither structural constraints nor enabling resources foreordain what individuals become and do in given situations. For the most part, social structures represent authorized social practices carried out by human beings occupying designated roles (Giddens, 1984). As such, they do not compel uniform action. Within the rule structures, there is a lot of personal variation in their interpretation, enforcement, adoption, circumvention, or active opposition (Burns & Dietz, in press). Efficacious people are quick to take advantage of opportunity structures and figure out ways to circumvent institutional constraints or change them by collective action. Conversely, ineffective people are less apt to exploit the enabling opportunities provided by the social system and are easily discouraged by institutional impediments. It is not a dichotomy between a disembodied social structure and a decontextualized personal agency, but a dynamic interplay between individuals and those who preside over the institutionalized operations of social systems. This interplay involves agentic transactions between institutional functionaries and those who seek to accommodate to or change their practices. Agency is just as integral to institutional functionaries as it is to freelancing individuals. Social cognitive theory thus avoids a dualism between individuals and society and between social structure and personal agency.

Sociostructural theories and psychological theories are often regarded as rival conceptions of human behavior or as representing different levels of causation. This perspective, too, is dualistic. Human behavior cannot be fully understood solely in terms of either social structural factors or psychological factors. A full understanding requires an integrated causal perspective in which social influences operate through self-processes that produce the actions. The self system is not merely a conduit for external influences, as structural reductionists might claim. The self is socially constituted, but, by exercising self-influence, individuals are partial contributors to what they become and do. Moreover, human agency operates generatively and proactively rather than just reactively. Thus, in the theory of
Determinism and the Exercise of Self-Influence

The discussion of agent causality raises the fundamental issues of determinism and the freedom to exert some control over one's life. The term determinism is used here to signify the production of effects by events rather than in the doctrinal sense meaning that actions are completely determined by a prior sequence of causes independent of the individual. Because most behavior is codetermined by many factors operating interactively, given events produce effects probabilistically rather than inevitably within the reciprocally deterministic system.

Freedom is often considered antithetical to determinism. When viewed from a sociocognitive perspective, there is no incompatibility between freedom and determinism. Freedom is not conceived negatively as exemption from social influences or situational constraints. Rather, it is defined positively as the exercise of self-influence to bring about desired results. This agentic causation relies heavily on cognitive self-regulation. It is achieved through reflective thought, generative use of the knowledge and skills at one's command, and other tools of self-influence, which choice and execution of action require. Self-influences operate deterministically on behavior in the same way external influences do. Given the same environmental conditions, people who have the ability to exercise many options and are adept at regulating their own motivation and behavior will have greater freedom to make things happen than will those who have limited means of personal agency. It is because self-influence operates deterministically on action that some measure of freedom is possible.

The choice of actions from among alternatives is not completely and involuntarily determined by environmental events. Rather, the making of choices is aided by reflective thought, through which self-influence is largely exercised. People exert some influence over what they do by the alternatives they consider; how they foresee and weigh the visualized outcomes, including their own self-evaluative reactions; and how they appraise their abilities to execute the options they consider. To say that thought guides action is an abbreviated statement of convenience rather than a conferment of agency on thought. It is not that individuals generate thoughts that then become the agents of action. The cognitive activities constitute the processes of self-influence that are brought to bear on the courses of action to take. Thus, for example, an individual will behave differently in an efficacious frame of mind than in an ineffectual one. But the individual remains the agent of the thoughts, the effort, and the actions. An elliptical expression should not be misconstrued as a transfer of agency from person to thought.

Agent causation involves the ability to behave differently from what environmental forces dictate rather than inevitably yield to them. In enticing and coercive situations, personal agency is...
expressed in the power to refrain. People construct personal standards that they then use to guide, motivate, and regulate their own behavior (Bandura, 1986a; 1991b). The anticipatory self-respect for actions that correspond to personal standards and self-censure for actions that violate them serve as the regulatory influences. People do things that give them self-satisfaction and a sense of self-worth. They refrain from behaving in ways that violate their personal standards because it will bring self-censure. After self-reactive capabilities are developed, behavior usually produces two sets of consequences—external outcomes and self-evaluative reactions—that can operate as complimentary or opposing influences on behavior. It is not uncommon for individuals to invest their self-worth so strongly in certain convictions that they will submit to prolonged mistreatment rather than accede to what they regard as unjust or immoral. Thomas More, who was beheaded for refusing to compromise his resolute convictions, is a notable example from history. In their everyday lives, people repeatedly confront predicaments in which they forgo expediency and material benefit for self-respect.

Self-influence affects not only choices but the success with which chosen courses of action are executed. Psychological analyses of the mechanisms of personal agency show that people contribute to the attainment of desired futures by enlisting cognitive guides and self-incentives and by selecting and constructing environments to suit their purposes (Bandura, 1986a). The greater their foresight, proficiency, and means of self-influence, all of which are acquirable skills, the more successful they are in achieving what they seek. Because of the capacity for self-influence, people are at least partial architects of their own destinies. It is not the principle of determinism that is in dispute, but whether determinism should be treated as a one-sided or a two-way process. Given the reciprocal interplay between people and their environment, determinism does not imply the fatalistic view that people are only pawns of external forces. Reciprocal causation provides people with opportunities to exercise some control over their destinies as well as setting limits on self-direction.

Arguments against the causal efficacy of thought and other means of self-influence usually invoke a selective regression of causes. In the operant view (Skinner, 1974), people are merely repositories for past stimulus inputs and conduits for external stimulation—they can add nothing to their performance. Through a conceptual sleight of hand, the determinants of human action are regressed to an “initiating cause” located in the environment, thus rendering human thought entirely externally implanted, acausal, and completely redundant. A detailed critique of this conceptual scheme is presented elsewhere (Bandura, 1996). Obviously, thought is partly influenced by experience, but thought is not completely shaped by past stimulus inputs. Operant analyses emphasize how people’s judgments and actions are determined by the environment but disregard the fact that the environment itself is partly determined by people’s actions. Environments have causes, as do actions. People create, alter, and destroy environments by their actions. The sociocognitive analysis of reciprocal causation does not invite an infinite regression of causes, because individuals originate actions from their experiences and reflective thought rather than merely undergo actions as implants of the past. The emergent creations are not reducible to the environmental inputs. For example, Bach’s magnificent masterpieces, which fill sixty volumes of prolific originality, are not reducible to his prior instruction in the mechanics of musical composition, his predecessors’ musical works, and the ongoing events in his everyday environment. Since Bach was not endowed with fully orchestrated Brandenburg concertos and hundreds of church cantatas, from which repository did the environmental reinforcers select these artistic creations? Reinforcement cannot select what does not exist in a repertoire. One can, of course, create simple new responses by waiting around for random variations to produce some approximate elements to reward. But given Bach’s prolific output, one would have to wait around for countless lifetimes to shape such artistic creations by selective reinforcement of random variations, if it could ever be achieved at all by this slow, laborious process. Although human
ingenuity incorporates some aspects of past experience, it transforms it, adds novel features to it, and thereby creates something that is not just a conglomerate or replica of the past. In short, human behavior is determined, but it is determined partly by the individual rather than solely by the environment. One does not explain a unique musical composition by attributing it to causes in the environment further back in time. The composition is an emergent creation.

The long-standing debate over the issue of freedom was enlivened by Skinner's (1971) contention that, apart from genetic contributions, human behavior is shaped and controlled by environmental contingencies. A major problem with this type of analysis is that it depicts two-way causality between people and environments as one-way control by an autonomous environment. In Skinner's view, freedom is an illusion. It is not that the interdependence of personal and environmental influences is never acknowledged by advocates of this point of view. Indeed, Skinner (1971) has often commented on people's capacity for countercontrol. The notion of countercontrol, however, portrays the environment as the instigator to which individuals can react. In fact, people are foreactive, not simply counteractive. Equivocation by the unidirectionalists created further conceptual ambiguities. Having acknowledged the reality of bidirectional influence, Skinner (1971) negated it by reasserting the preeminent control of behavior by the environment: "A person does not act upon the world, the world acts upon him." The environment thus reappears as an autonomous force that automatically selects, shapes, and controls behavior. Whatever illusions are made to two-way influences, environmental rule clearly emerges as the reigning metaphor in this view of reality.

It is the height of irony when people who exercise the liberties guaranteed by institutions of freedom denigrate freedom as an illusion. Over the course of history, countless people have sacrificed their lives to create and preserve institutions of freedom that prohibit rulers from forcing obedience to unauthorized dictates. Struggles for freedom are aimed at creating institutional safeguards that exempt certain forms of behavior from coercive and punitive control. The less social jurisdiction there is over given spheres of activities, the greater is the causal contribution of self-influence to choice of action in those domains. After protective laws are built into social systems, there are certain things that a society may not do to individuals who choose to challenge conventional values or vested interests, however much it might like to. Legal prohibitions against unauthorized societal control create personal freedoms that are realities, not illusory abstractions. Societies differ in their institutions of freedom and in the number and types of activities that are officially exempted from punitive control. For example, social systems that protect journalists from criminal sanctions for criticizing government officials and their practices are freer than those that allow authoritative power to be used to silence critics or their vehicles of expression. Societies that possess a judiciary independent of other government institutions ensure greater social freedom than those that do not.

When it comes to social change, thoroughgoing environmental determinists become fervent advocates of people's power to change their lives for the better by applying the advocate's psychotechnology. For example, Skinner spent much of the later part of his career promoting, with missionary earnestness, operant technology as the remedy for the world's ills. Even the modest applications of operant conditioning fell short of his claims, let alone providing the panaceas for growing worldwide problems. A fervent environmental determinist arguing people to change their environment is amusingly self-negating because it contradicts the basic premise of the doctrine of environmentalism. If humans were, in fact, incapable of acting as causal agents, they could describe the changes they were undergoing in response to the dictates of their environment, but they could not select actions based on reasoned plans and foresight of consequences, nor could they intentionally make desired things happen. They can be conduits for environmental forces, but they themselves cannot be creators of programs for environmental change. Boring (1957) provided a thoughtful analysis of the "egocentric
predicament" in which advocacy environmental determinists get themselves entangled by regarding themselves as self-directing agents but other folks as being externally determined. The advocates thus exempt themselves from the overriding environmental control that presumably shepherds the rest of the populace. Otherwise, the advocates' own views simply become utterances shaped by their insular environment and, thus, have no special truth value. However, should members of the populace adopt the technology of the advocate, they are suddenly converted into intentional agents who can improve their lives and shape their future.

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RELATED VIEWS
OF PERSONAL EFFICACY
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Self-referent thought plays a paramount role in most contemporary theories of human behavior. Self-conceptions, of course, have many different facets. Although they are all self-referential, not all of the facets are concerned with personal efficacy, and this has been the source of some confusion in the literature. Even theories that explicitly speak to the issue of personal efficacy typically differ in how they view the nature of efficacy beliefs, their origins, the effects they have, their changeability, and the intervening processes through which they affect psychosocial functioning. Theories of the self differ not only in conceptual orientation but also in comprehensiveness. The various theoretical perspectives rarely encompass all the important aspects of efficacy beliefs. Much of the research generated by the various theories is tied to an omnibus measure of perceived control and devoted to a search for its correlates. A full understanding of personal causation requires a comprehensive theory that explains, within a unified conceptual framework, the origins of efficacy beliefs, their structure and function, the processes through which they produce diverse effects, and their modifiability. Efficacy theory addresses all these subprocesses at both the individual level and the collective level.

The social cognitive theory of the origin and function of perceived self-efficacy offers certain other analytic and operative advantages. It specifies other aspects of the conglomeration self-system. These include, among other things, personal aspirations, outcome expectations, perceived opportunity structures, and constraints, and conceptions of personal efficacy. Analysis of how these constituent factors work together and their relative contribution to adaptation and change provides an integrated view of the self (Bandura, 1986a). These sociocognitive determinants are grounded in a large body of empirical evidence about the mechanisms by which they motivate and regulate behavior. The conceptual and empirical linkages of other determinants to perceived self-efficacy deepen understanding of how people guide and shape their own destinies. By embedding the self-efficacy belief system in a unified sociocognitive framework, the theory can integrate diverse bodies of findings in varied spheres of functioning.

The value of a theory is ultimately judged by the power of the methods it yields to effect changes. Self-efficacy theory provides explicit guidelines on how to enable people to exercise some influence over how they live their lives. A theory that can be readily used to enhance human efficacy has much greater social utility than theories that provide correlates of perceived control but have little to say about how to foster desired changes. The following sections review alternative conceptions of personal efficacy, as well as constructs that are sometimes mistakenly grouped with perceived efficacy as if they resembled one another when, in fact, they are concerned with different phenomena.

Self-Concept

Self-appraisal has often been analyzed in terms of the self-concept (Rogers, 1959; Wylie, 1974). The self-concept is a composite view of oneself that is presumed to be formed through direct experience and evaluations adopted from significant others. Self-concepts are measured by having people rate how well descriptive statements of different
attributes apply to themselves. Their role in personal functioning is tested by correlating the composite self-concepts, or disparities between actual and ideal selves, with various indices of adjustment, attitudes, and behavior.

Examining self-referent processes in terms of the self-concept contributes to an understanding of people's attitudes toward themselves and how these attitudes may affect their general outlook on life. There are several features of theories of this type, however, that detract from their power to explain and predict human behavior. For the most part, the theories are concerned with global self-images. Combining diverse attributes into a single index creates confusion about what is actually being measured and how much weight is given to particular attributes in the forced summary judgment. Even if the global self-conception is tied to certain areas of functioning, it does not do justice to the complexity of efficacy beliefs, which vary across different domains of activities, within the same activity domain at different levels of difficulty, and under different circumstances. A composite self-image may yield some weak correlations, but it is not equal to the task of predicting, with any degree of accuracy, the wide variations in behavior that typically occur in a given domain of activity under different conditions. Such theories fail to explain how the same self-concept can spawn different types of behavior. In comparative tests of predictive power, efficacy beliefs are highly predictive of behavior, whereas the effect of self-concept is weaker and equivocal (Pajares & Kranzler, 1995; Pajares & Miller, 1994a, 1995). Self-concept loses most, if not all, of its predictive-ness when the influence of perceived efficacy is factored out. Such findings suggest that self-concept largely reflects people's beliefs in their personal efficacy.

Differentiating Self-Efficacy from Self-Esteem

The concepts of self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy are often used interchangeably as though they represented the same phenomenon. In fact, they refer to entirely different things. Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of personal capability, whereas self-esteem is concerned with judgments of self-worth. There is no fixed relationship between beliefs about one's capabilities and whether one likes or dislikes oneself. Individuals may judge themselves hopelessly ineffectual in a given activity without suffering any loss of self-esteem whatsoever, because they do not invest their self-worth in that activity. The fact that I acknowledge complete inefficacy in ballroom dancing does not drive me to recurrent bouts of self-devaluation. Conversely, individuals may regard themselves as highly efficacious in an activity but take no pride in performing it well. A skilled forecloser of mortgages of families that have fallen on hard times is unlikely to feel pride for driving them out of their homes proficiently. It is true, however, that people tend to cultivate their capabilities in activities that give them a sense of self-worth. If empirical analyses are confined to activities in which people invest their sense of self-worth, they will inflate correlations between self-efficacy and self-esteem, because the analyses ignore both domains of functioning in which people judge themselves ineffectual but could not care less and those in which they feel highly efficacious but take no pride in performing the activity well because of its socially injurious consequences.

People need much more than high self-esteem to do well in given pursuits. Many achievers are hard on themselves because they adopt standards that are not easily fulfilled, whereas others may enjoy high self-esteem because they do not demand much of themselves or they derive their esteem from sources other than personal accomplishments. Consequently, self-liking does not necessarily beget performance attainments. They are the product of toilsome self-disciplined effort. People need firm confidence in their efficacy to mount and sustain the effort required to succeed. Thus, in ongoing pursuits, perceived personal efficacy predicts the goals people set for themselves and their performance attainments, whereas self-esteem affects neither personal goals nor performance (Mone, Baker & Jeffries, 1995).
The inappropriate equation of self-esteem with perceived self-efficacy has both methodological and conceptual sources. Some of the instruments devised to measure self-esteem include self-appraisals of both personal efficacy and self-worth, thus confounding factors that should be separated (Coopersmith, 1967). Some authors mistakenly regard self-esteem as the generalized form of perceived self-efficacy. For example, Harter (1990) treats judgments of self-worth and personal competence as representing levels of generality within the same phenomenon. Self-worth is said to be global and perceived competence to be domain-specific. Global self-worth is considered to be an emergent superordinate property that is more than the sum of the domain-specific competencies. The assessment of global self-worth is disembodied from particular domains of functioning that contribute in varying degrees to one's sense of self-pride or self-dislike. That is, people are asked how much they like or dislike themselves without any regard to what it is they like or dislike. Measurement of self-worth noncontextually and perceived competence specifically presumably integrates unidimensional and multidimensional perspectives into a hierarchical model of self-evaluation.

As already noted, judgments of self-worth and personal efficacy represent different phenomena, not part-whole relationships within the same phenomenon. Moreover, self-esteem is no less multidimensional than perceived efficacy. People vary in the extent to which they derive a sense of self-worth from their work, their family life, their community and social life, and their recreational pursuits. For example, some students may take pride in their academic accomplishments but devalue themselves in their social facility. Hard-driving executives may value themselves highly in their occupational pursuits but devalue themselves as parents. Domain-linked measures of self-worth reveal the patterning of human self-esteem and the areas of vulnerability to self-disparagement. There is neither conceptual nor empirical justification for construing self-worth globally. Nor is self-esteem the generalized embodiment of specific efficacy beliefs.

There are several sources of self-esteem or self-worthiness (Bandura, 1986a). Self-esteem can stem from self-evaluations based on personal competence or on possession of attributes that are culturally invested with positive or negative value. In self-esteem arising from personal competence, people derive pride from fulfilling their standards of merit. They experience self-satisfaction for a job well done but are displeased with themselves when they fail to measure up to their standards of merit. Personal competencies that provide the means for achieving valued accomplishments afford a genuine basis of self-esteem. This source of self-evaluation enables people to exert some influence over their own self-esteem by developing potentialities that bring self-satisfactions from personal accomplishments.

People often voice evaluations that reflect their likes and dislikes of the attributes possessed by others rather than judging them by their accomplishments. In these instances, the social evaluations are linked to personal attributes and social status rather than to personal competencies. For example, people who are socially relegated to subordinate positions may be disparaged. In conflict-ridden families, parents may deprecate offspring who possess attributes resembling those of a disliked spouse. Social evaluations tend to influence how the recipients come to evaluate their own self-worthiness. Moreover, people are often criticized or deprecated when they fail to live up to the ideals or aspirational standards imposed upon them by others. To the extent that they adopt those onerous standards, most of their accomplishments will bring them nothing but self-devaluation because they fail to measure up. The roles played by personal competence and social evaluation in the development of self-esteem receive support from the studies of Coopersmith (1967). He found that children who exhibited high self-esteem had parents who were accepting, who set explicit attainable standards, and who provided their children with considerable support and latitude to acquire competencies that could serve them well in their pursuits.

Cultural stereotyping is another way in which evaluative social judgments affect a sense of self-worth. People are often cast into valued or devalued groups on the basis of their ethnicity, race, sex, or physical characteristics. They then get treated in
terms of the social stereotype rather than on the basis of their actual individuality. In situations that give salience to the stereotype, those stereotyped suffer losses in self-esteem (Steele, 1996). Devaluative societal practices are usually clothed in social justifications that fault the disfavored groups for their maltreatment. Justified devaluation can have more devastating effects on judgments of self-worth than acknowledged antipathy. When blame is convincingly ascribed to a devalued group, many of its members may eventually come to believe the degrading characterizations of themselves (Hallie, 1971). Discriminatory social practices help to create some of the very failings that serve as justifications for the devaluation. Thus, vindicated inhumanity is more likely to instill self-devaluation in disparaged groups than inhumanity that does not attempt to justify itself. People who possess attributes that are socially disparaged, and who accept the stereotyped negative evaluations of others, will hold themselves in low regard irrespective of their talents.

Because self-esteem has many sources, there is no single remedy for low self-esteem. People who combine limited competencies, exacting standards of self-evaluation, and socially disparaged attributes are the ones most likely to harbor a pervasive sense of worthlessness. These different sources of self-devaluation call for different corrective measures. Self-devaluation rooted in incompetence requires the cultivation of talents for personal accomplishments that bring self-satisfaction. Those who suffer from self-disparagement because they judge themselves harshly against excessively high standards become more self-accepting and self-rewarding after they are helped to adopt more realistic standards of achievement (Jackson, 1972; Rehm, 1982). Self-devaluation resulting from belittling social evaluations requires humane treatment by others that affirms one's self-worth. Self-devaluation stemming from discriminatory disparagement of attributes requires modeling and rewarding a sense of pride in those attributes. Efforts by minorities to instill pride in racial characteristics (for example, "Black is beautiful") illustrate this approach. When self-devaluation arises from multiple sources, multiple corrective measures are needed; for example, fostering pride in one's characteristics but also cultivating competencies that instill a high and resilient sense of personal efficacy for personal accomplishments.

Effectance Motivation

In seeking motivations for exploratory behavior, White (1959, 1960) postulated an effectance motive. This motive is conceptualized as an intrinsic need to deal effectively with the environment. The production of effects through exploratory activities builds competencies and is said to be satisfying in its own right. The effectance motive presumably develops through cumulative acquisition of knowledge and skills in managing the environment. In these conceptual papers, White argues eloquently for a competence model of human development that is rooted in nonbiologic drives. Behavior is pursued for the feelings of efficacy derived from it. White provides only a general conceptual framework, however, rather than a particularized theory from which testable deductions can be made. How an effectance motive is created by effective transactions with the environment is never spelled out. The impact of failed efforts, which are all too common, receives no mention. Nor is the nature of the intrinsic reward of effective action specified in a way that would be subject to test. Harter (1981) has elaborated White's formulation into a developmental model of intrinsic mastery motivation.

It is difficult to verify the existence of an effectance or mastery motive because the motive is inferred from the very exploratory behavior it supposedly causes. This creates problems of circularity. Without an independent measure of motive strength, one cannot tell whether people explore and manipulate things because they are propelled by a competence motive to do so, or for the satisfactions they derive or anticipate from the activity. There is a marked difference between being driven by an intrinsic effectance motive and being motivated by anticipated outcomes. We will return to this issue in Chapter 6, which presents a
conceptualization of intrinsic motivation within the framework of social cognitive theory.

Over the years, theorists have argued about whether it is the push of boredom and apprehension or the pull of novelty that rouses organisms to exploratory action (Berlyne, 1960; Brown, 1953; Harlow, 1953; Mower, 1960b). Critics of exploratory drives have been able to explain and to alter some forms of exploratory behavior by the outcomes it produces without recourse to an underlying drive (Fowler, 1971). However, theories concerned solely with external prompts and immediate rewards for action are hard-pressed to explain the directedness and persistence of behavior over extended periods when immediate situational inducements are weak, absent, or even negative. This type of sustained involvement in activities requires self-regulatory capabilities that operate anticipatorily. Efficacy beliefs play a crucial role in the ongoing self-regulation of motivation, as will be shown later.

The theory of effectance motivation has not been formulated in sufficient detail to permit extensive theoretical comparisons. Nevertheless, effectance theory and social cognitive theory clearly differ over several issues. In the sociocognitive view, choice behavior, effort, and persistence are extensively regulated by beliefs of personal efficacy rather than by an effectance drive. Because efficacy beliefs are defined and measured independently of performance, they provide a basis for predicting the occurrence, generality, and persistence of behavior. In contrast, it is difficult to explain the variability of human behavior in terms of an overall intrinsic motive drive (Bandura, 1991b). People will approach, explore, and try to manage situations within their perceived capabilities, but unless they are externally coerced, they avoid transactions with those aspects of their environment that they perceive exceed their coping abilities.

These alternative views also differ in how they explain the origins of personal efficacy. In effectance theory, the effectance motive develops gradually through prolonged transactions with the environment. The theory thus focuses almost exclusively on exploratory behavior as the source of effectance. In social cognitive theory, efficacy beliefs are developed and altered not only by direct mastery experiences but also by vicarious experience, social evaluations by significant others, and changes in physiological states or how they are construed. These differences in theoretical approach have significant implications for how one goes about creating a strong sense of efficacy.

Beliefs of personal efficacy do not operate as dispositional determinants independently of contextual factors. Some situations require greater self-regulatory skill and more arduous performance than others. Efficacy beliefs will vary accordingly. Thus, for example, the level and strength of personal efficacy in public speaking will differ depending on the subject matter, whether the speech is extemporaneous or from notes, and the evaluative standards of the audiences to be addressed, to mention just a few conditional factors. Therefore, analyses of how efficacy beliefs affect actions rely on microanalytic measures rather than global indices of personality traits or motives of effectance. It is no more informative to speak of self-efficacy in general terms than to speak of nonspecific social behavior.

In effectance theory, affecting the environment arouses feelings of efficacy and pleasure. Although such feelings may arise from performance attainments, attainments do not necessarily enhance perceived self-efficacy. Attainments may raise, lower, or leave unchanged beliefs of personal efficacy, depending on what is made of those attainments. Nor does the successful exercise of personal efficacy necessarily bring pleasure or raise self-esteem. It depends on how attainments measure up against internal standards. If the level of efficacy that is realized falls short of personal standards of merit, the accomplishment may, in fact, leave one with self-discontent. Students with stringent academic standards will not swell with pride upon achieving only modest improvements in academic activities important to them. The pace at which activities are mastered can drastically alter self-evaluative reactions (Simon, 1979a). Accomplishments that surpass earlier ones bring a continued sense of self-satisfaction. But people derive little satisfaction from smaller accomplishments, or even devalue them, after having
made larger strides. Early spectacular accomplishments reflecting exemplary proficiency can thus be conducive to later self-dissatisfaction even in the face of continuing personal attainments. Nor will high self-efficaciousness in an activity boost self-satisfaction if the activity happens to be devalued. When competencies are used for inhumane purposes, performers may feel self-efficacious in their triumphs but remain displeased with themselves for the sorrow they have wrought.

The relationship between personal attainments and self-satisfaction is clearly more complex than effectance theory would lead one to believe. A theory of effectance must consider the important role played by personal standards and the cognitive appraisal of attainments in people's affective reactions to their own performances. These are some of the mechanisms that determine whether performance attainments bring pleasure or displeasure. The manner in which internal standards and efficacy beliefs operate as interrelated mechanisms of personal agency and affective self-reactions is addressed in a later chapter.

Effectance motivation is said to come into play only under certain limited conditions (White, 1959), a point that is often overlooked in overextensions of the theory to wide spheres of behavior. The effectance motive is believed to be aroused when the organism is otherwise unoccupied or is only weakly stimulated by organic drives. In the words of White (1960), effectance promotes *spare-time behavior*. In social cognitive theory, efficacy beliefs enter into the regulation of all types of performances, until they become routinized into habitual patterns. Although the theory of effectance motivation lacks verifiable particulars, considerable research disputes its two basic premises: that people are inherently driven to exercise control over their environment and that the achievement of control is inherently self-satisfying (Bandura, 1986a; Rodin, Rennert, & Solomon, 1980). We will return to a more detailed discussion of the issue of inherent motivators shortly.

Yarrow and his associates have recast effectance motivation in a more testable form (Yarrow et al., 1983). They call it mastery motivation and construe it as a striving for competence—which, in turn, is defined as effective action in dealing with the environment. Mastery motivation is manifested in attentiveness, exploratory behavior, and persistence in goal-directed activities. Developmental tests of the nature and correlates of this postulated motive system yield equivocal findings. Behavioral indices of mastery motivation are weakly related to one another and become even more heterogeneous with increasing age of the people tested. A mastery motive that does not hang together presents conceptual problems. The same mastery behavior shows little consistency over even a short time, reflecting surprising instability. Moreover, indices of mastery motivation are not consistently linked to actual competence. The authors, however, place a positive interpretation on this extensive disconnectedness. The mastery motive simply takes on the shape of the empirical findings. The proponents argue that weak relationships between different indices of the same motive serve as evidence that mastery motivation is multifaceted. Increasing heterogeneity indicates that the motive becomes more differentiated with age. Lack of behavioral continuity indicates that the motive undergoes developmental transformation. And the inconsistent linkage between mastery motivation and actual competence is taken as evidence that they create each other interactively, although one would expect reciprocal causation to produce a strong relationship.

A more plausible conclusion to be drawn from the extensive disconnectedness is that striving for competence is not driven by an omnibus mastery motive but rather is motivated by the varied benefits of competent action. What competent functioning is differs across time, milieus, social standards, and domains of activity. Competence requires appropriate learning experiences; it does not emerge spontaneously. Hence, people develop different patterns of competencies and deploy them selectively depending on the match of efficacy beliefs to environmental demands and on anticipated outcomes. A functional analysis of striving for competence can better explain variations in the patterning of human competencies than does one cast in terms of an omnibus mastery motive.
The Exercise of Personal Control: Inborn Drive or Prevalent Incentive?

As previously noted, personal control enables one to predict events and shape them to one's liking. A major issue of contention is whether the exercise of personal efficacy is impelled by an inborn drive for control or is motivated by anticipated benefits. There is a fundamental difference between the two. Drives push action, anticipated incentives draw it (Bolles, 1975a). For example, most people are drawn to television and spend countless hours watching it for the enjoyment it provides, but one would hardly regard television viewing as impelled by an inborn drive. Being deprived of television will not cause the buildup of a drive pressuring for release by exposure to televised fare. Theorists in which a drive for control is inferred from the very behavior it supposedly causes are fraught with difficulties. Drive theories become testable if drives are measured independently of the behavior they supposedly activate. If variations in controlling drive are taken as evidence of variations in strength of a drive for control, the circularity strips the theory of any explanatory or predictive value. Unless the strength of a drive is measured separately from its postulated effects, the functional properties ascribed to it are empirically unverifiable.

Some theorists regard the striving for control as an expression of an inborn drive (Deci & Ryan, 1985; White, 1959). For others, the striving for control is couched in the language of an inborn drive without explicitly designating it as such. Thus, it becomes an "intrinsic necessity of life" (Adler, 1956), "a primary motivational propensity" (DeCharms, 1978), "a motive system" that impels the organism (Harter, 1981), a universal "inborn desire" for competence (Skinner, 1995), and the like. Such characterizations leave considerable ambiguity about whether the motivation for control is an acquired propensity or an inherited endowment. In social cognitive theory, people exercise control for the benefits they gain by it. Some of these benefits may involve biological gratifications, but the striving for control is not a drive in its own right. Treatises on perceived and actual control typically emphasize the importance of the intrinsic value of control. But control is not exercised universally with blissful outcomes. There are many conditions under which people shun control; this fact is a serious problem for inborn drive theories but is compatible with incentive motivation theories.

When personal control is easy to exercise and enables one to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life, it is highly desired. Indeed, in laboratory studies in which aversive events can be controlled by simple acts requiring little in the way of skills, expenditure of effort, and risks, personal control is decidedly preferred (Miller, 1979). Personal control is neither universally desired nor routinely exercised, however. There is an onerous side to personal control that quickly dampens interest in it. Self-development of personal efficacy requires mastery of knowledge and skills attainable only through long hours of arduous work. This calls for the sacrifice of many gratifications. Moreover, maintaining proficiency in one's pursuits, many of which require upgrading of skills with rapid social and technological advances, demands continued investment of time, effort, and resources. A noted composer put it succinctly when he remarked, "The toughest thing about success is that you've got to keep on being a success."

In addition to the hard work of continual self-development, in many situations the exercise of personal control carries heavy responsibilities and risks. For example, managers of organizations are granted considerable controlling power, but they must bear personal responsibility for the effects of their decisions and actions, some of which have widespread repercussions. It is usually the most self-efficacious individuals who assume leadership positions of high potential stress and strain. They are held accountable but must depend on others to get things done. Their lives can be made miserable if they have to preside over conflicting social expectations, pressures, and demands (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek, 1964). These burdensome aspects of personal control can dull the appetite for it. Attractive incentives, privileges, and hearty social rewards are therefore needed to get people to seek control in pursuits involving complex skills, onerous responsibilities, and weighty risks.
Proxy Control

People are often willing to relinquish control over events that affect their lives to free themselves of the performance demands and hazards that the exercise of control entails. Rather than strive for direct control, they seek their well-being and security in proxy control. In this socially mediated mode of control, people try to get those who wield influence and power to act on their behalf to effect the changes they desire. Children pressure parents to get what they want; employees work through intermediaries to alter organizational practices; and the citizenry tries to shape its social future by influencing the actions of its governmental representatives and other public officials. Effective proxy control requires a high sense of personal efficacy to influence intermediaries who, in turn, operate as the agents of desired improvements.

In many areas of life, individuals do not have direct control over the institutional mechanisms of change and therefore must turn to proxy control to alter their lives for the better. All too often, however, people surrender control to intermediaries in areas over which they do have some direct influence. They choose not to exercise direct control because they have not developed the means to do so, they believe others can do it better, or they do not want to saddle themselves with the onerous responsibilities that personal control entails. Part of the price of proxy control is a vulnerable security that rests on the competence, power, and favors of others.

A low sense of efficacy fosters dependence on proxy control, which further reduces opportunities to build the skills needed for efficacious action. The influential role of comparative efficacy evaluation in proxy control is revealed in studies by Miller and her associates (Miller, 1980). People who are led to believe that they possess superior coping ability handle aversive problems by themselves, whereas those who believe themselves to be less skilled yield control to others to cope with the aversive environment. The dependent ones enjoy the protective benefits without the performance demands and attendant stress, while the controllers do the work and suffer the distress over managing arduous task demands and the risks of failure.

People who are in the habit of exercising personal control do not like to place their fate in the hands of others, even when it is advantageous for them to do so. Competitive, hard-driving, type A individuals are constantly struggling to master task demands impatiently and with a sense of time urgency (Glass & Carver, 1980). Miller, Lack, and Asroff (1985) found that people who exhibit the type A coping pattern would rather suffer aversive experiences than relinquish control to others who can manage the situation better. Type B's, who are more relaxed and easygoing, readily give up control under similar circumstances. Female type A's are willing to yield control provisionally to someone who is more skilled if they can reclaim it at will. But many male type A's will not surrender control even provisionally.

Inadvertent Relinquishment of Personal Control

Many factors operate in everyday life to undermine efficacious use of the knowledge and skills that people possess. As a result, they do not exercise the personal control that is fully within their capabilities. In a program of research on illusory incompetence, Langer (1979) has given us a better understanding of how people give up personal control, either by making erroneous inferences from their experiences or by inadvertent action. At the time the actions are taken, people do not perceive themselves as relinquishing control, nor do they realize that their actions may hinder their future competence. Since the self-debilitation goes largely unnoticed, there is little reason to resist it.

People often relinquish personal control by their actions because it is the easier thing to do at the time. Langer (1979) documents the various conditions under which this is likely to happen. In some instances, the effort involved in mastering an activity seems to outweigh its perceived potential benefits. In others, people foster self-induced dependencies when they can obtain valued outcomes.
more easily by having somebody else do things for them. Settings in which individuals happen to perform poorly can, in themselves, come to activate a sense of incompetence that impairs future performance in those particular contexts. The contextual activation of inefficacy is well illustrated by athletic performances in which winners regularly lose to weaker opponents in settings in which they have come to expect difficulties because of past upsets. The mere presence of an opponent exuding high confidence can undermine one's use of routine skills. Attending to what is strange in new tasks, rather than to what is familiar about them and clearly within one's capability, may similarly hinder the effective use of skills. Rigid mind-sets impede generative use of one's knowledge and skills in new situations in which they would be useful. When people are cast in subordinate roles or are assigned inferior labels, implying limited competence, they perform activities at which they are highly skilled less well than when they are not labeled negatively or placed in a subordinate role. Racial and gender stereotyping similarly undermines the effective use of cognitive skills (Steele, 1996). Thus, African-American students asked to state their race perform more poorly on standardized college entrance exams than those not asked to give their racial status. Women perform worse than men on math tests characterized as sensitive to gender differences, but they perform as well on the same tests when they are depicted as insensitive to gender. Offering unnecessary help can also detract from a sense of competence and thereby impair the execution of skills.

Mindlessness is hypothesized by Langer and Park (1990) to underlie illusory incompetence. Environmental cues suggestive of personal deficiencies are said to trigger poor performance when routine situations are no longer given thoughtful consideration. Undoubtedly, some instances of deficient skill use do reflect routinized situational control of action. But situational influences also activate other processes that can detract from the effective use of skills. Verification of an explanatory mechanism is greatly aided if the mediating process is measured rather than simply presumed to be operating. The presumptive mediation of mindlessness could be tested by assessing whether the extent to which people think about the situations they are in accounts for variations in how much their performance is undermined by situational influences suggesting personal deficiency. The degree of mindful involvement in the activities at hand could also be varied systematically and its impact on effective use of preexisting skills measured.

We know from other lines of research that the types of situations that produce illusory incompetence diminish perceived self-efficacy, with concomitant effects on choice behavior, motivation, stress, and self-debilitating thought. For example, a formidable-looking opponent instills lower efficacy beliefs than does one who looks less impressive (Weinberg, Yukelson, & Jackson, 1980). Illusory strengthened beliefs of personal efficacy in relation to an opponent heighten competitive performance and resilience, whereas illusory weakened efficacy beliefs debilitate competitive performance and increase vulnerability to the adverse effects of failure (Weinberg, Gould, & Jackson, 1979). The more the efficacy beliefs are diminished, the greater is the performance debilitation.

Trivial situational factors, devoid of information that could affect competence, can nevertheless influence efficacy beliefs (Cervone & Peake, 1986; Peake & Cervone, 1989). Illusory efficacy beliefs exert a strong effect on the level of performance motivation. Dwelling on formidable aspects of a task weakens people's belief in their efficacy, but focusing on doable aspects of the same task raises self-efficacy beliefs (Cervone, 1989). The stronger the altered efficacy beliefs, the longer people persevere in the face of repeated failure. In these diverse experiments, variations in perceived self-efficacy predict variation in motivation under the same conditions as well as between different conditions. Biasing external influences impair performance through their influence on efficacy beliefs rather than directly. Once people develop a mind-set about their efficacy in given situations, they act on their established self-beliefs without further reappraising their capabilities.
Outcome Expectancy Theories

With the ascendancy of cognitive theories of behavior, the concept of expectancy assumed an increasingly prominent place in explanations of human functioning. Psychological theories postulating that expectations influence actions focused almost exclusively on outcome expectations. Irwin's (1971) theory of motivation and intentional behavior was formulated in terms of act-outcome expectancies. In Bolles's (1975b) view, learning essentially involves the acquisition of expectancies that particular situational events or behaviors will give rise to certain outcomes. Rotter's (1966) conceptual scheme centers on causal beliefs about the relationship between actions and outcomes. In a similar vein, Seligman (1975) set forth the view that people behave resignedly when they acquire expectancies that they cannot affect outcomes through their actions. According to expectancy-valence theories, performance is jointly influenced by the expectancy that behaving in a particular way will lead to a given outcome and the desirability of that outcome (Atkinson, 1964; Feather, 1982; Vroom, 1964).

The heavy emphasis on outcome expectations can be traced, in large part, to the Tolmanian roots of this line of theorizing. Tolman formulated his conceptual system at a time when competing psychological theories sought to resolve controversies about learning by examining how animals learn to solve mazes. The prevailing theories at the time viewed learning mainly as the acquisition of habits (Hull, 1943; Spence, 1956). Tolman (1932, 1951) interpreted learning as the development of expectancies that behavior will produce certain outcomes. The question of whether the animals had the ability to get to the goal box was, of course, never at issue. They came fully endowed with the trivial behavioral skill needed to navigate the prefixed path. Therefore, what the animals expected to find in the goal box was considered to be the major determinant of their choice behavior. The influential role of self-referent thought in the regulation of motivation and action was understandably disregarded, because animals are not given to self-reflection and do not structure the meager options in their lives on the basis of self-beliefs of what they can and cannot do. In contrast, the self-referent belief system is fundamental to adaptive human functioning. People's beliefs in their efficacy affect almost everything they do: how they think, motivate themselves, feel, and behave.

Some of the theorizing about the controllability of outcomes is sometimes likened to the notion of perceived efficacy. According to the theory of personality proposed by Rotter (1966), behavior is influenced by generalized expectancies that outcomes are determined either by one's actions or by external forces beyond one's control. Such expectations about the instrumental value of behavior are considered to be largely the product of one's reinforcement history. Most of the research within this tradition is concerned with the extent to which behavior can be predicted by individual differences in the tendency to perceive outcomes as being either personally or externally determined (Lefcourt, 1976, 1979; Phares, 1976; Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). In general, people who believe that their outcomes are determined by their behavior tend to be more active than those who perceive outcomes fatalistically.

External causality is often viewed in terms of beliefs that outcomes depend on chance factors. Gurin and her associates have argued that lack of personal control is often due not to chance or whimsy but to the unresponsiveness of social systems and the barriers they erect to protect vested interests and the status quo (Gurin & Brim, 1984; Gurin, Gurin, & Morrison, 1978). Social systems may be unresponsive because adequate solutions to problems are not yet available. More often, however, it is because they are negatively biased against certain classes of people but promote and reward the competencies of the members they favor. Institutional biases either bar access to opportunity structures or impose higher competence requirements on members of disfavored groups who are trying to attain valued outcomes. The imposition of higher competence requirements is illustrated by the changing social practices with respect to administrative roles in organizations. At one time,
executive positions were closed to minorities and women, no matter how talented they were. Later, the extraordinarily talented could gain entry into lower echelons. Still later, differential competence requirements were largely removed for entry into subordinate ranks, but they still operate strongly at top executive levels.

- Perceived self-efficacy and locus of control are sometimes mistakenly viewed as essentially the same phenomenon measured at different levels of generality. In point of fact, they represent entirely different phenomena. Beliefs about whether one can produce certain actions (perceived self-efficacy) cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be considered the same as beliefs about whether actions affect outcomes (locus of control). The conceptual distinction is corroborated empirically (Bandura, 1991b). Evidence reviewed in the next chapter shows that perceived self-efficacy and locus of control bear little or no relationship to each other. With regard to their relationship to behavior, perceived self-efficacy is a uniformly good predictor of diverse forms of behavior, whereas locus of control is generally a weak or inconsistent predictor of the same behaviors. This is not to say that outcome expectations have no impact on behavior. They do, if particularized and assessed in relation to the actions that can produce them. Social cognitive theory identifies different classes of expected outcomes and measures them in discriminative ways linked to performances situated in contexts rather than in general decontextualized ways.

It is widely assumed that beliefs that personal actions determine outcomes give rise to a sense of efficacy and power, whereas beliefs that outcomes occur regardless of what one does create apathy. It should be noted, however, that Rotter's (1966) conceptual scheme is primarily concerned with causal beliefs about the relationship between actions and outcomes, not with personal efficacy. Beliefs about the locus of outcome causality must be distinguished from beliefs about personal efficacy. Beliefs that outcomes are determined by one's own behavior can be either demoralizing or empowering, depending on whether or not one believes one can produce the required behavior. People who regard outcomes as personally determined, but who lack requisite skills, would experience a low sense of efficacy and view the activities with a sense of futility. Thus, for example, children who lack understanding of arithmetic concepts and expect their course grades to depend entirely on the quality of their mathematical performance have every reason to be demoralized. It is when people have the efficacy to perform well that belief that outcomes are dependent on their actions will create a sense of causative power.

Human behavior and affective states would be best predicted by the combined influence of efficacy beliefs and the types of performance outcomes expected within given social systems. The structural features of social systems that are especially germane concern the opportunities they provide and the constraints they impose. As shown in Figure 1.2, different patterns of efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations have different psychosocial and emotional effects. A high sense of personal efficacy

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**FIGURE 1.2.** The effects of different patterns of efficacy beliefs and performance outcome expectancies on behavior and affective states. The plus and minus signs represent positive and negative qualities of efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies.
in a responsive environment that rewards valued accomplishments fosters aspirations, productive engagement in activities, and a sense of fulfillment. These are the conditions that enable people to exercise substantial control over their lives through self-development.

Consider the pattern combining high personal efficacy with low environmental responsiveness. Efficacious individuals who cannot gain valued outcomes through personal accomplishments will not necessarily cease trying. Those with low perceived efficacy quickly give up when their efforts fail to produce results. But self-efficacious individuals will intensify their efforts and, if necessary, try to change inequitable social practices. This pattern in which competency goes unrewarded or is punished underscores the need to differentiate two levels of control: control over the outcomes that accomplishments bring and control over the social systems that prescribe what the outcomes will be for given endeavors. Piece-rate workers may control their incomes by how hard they work but exercise no control over the unit pay rate the system sets. Gurin and Brim (1984) and Lacey (1979a) address this issue of control over social systems, which typically receives scant attention in psychological analyses of controllability. Conditions combining high personal efficacy and environmental unresponsiveness generate resentment, protest, and collective efforts to change existing institutional practices (Bandura, 1973; Short & Wolfgang, 1972). Should reforms be hard to achieve, given better options, people will desert environments that are unresponsive to their efforts and pursue their activities elsewhere.

The joint influence of efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations provides a basis for differentiating conditions conducive to apathy from those likely to drive people to bouts of despondency. When people have a low sense of personal efficacy and no amount of effort by themselves or others like them produces valued outcomes, they become apathetic and resigned to a dreary life. If no one can succeed, people become convinced of their powerlessness to improve the human condition. As a result, they do not put much effort into effecting changes.

The pattern in which people perceive themselves as ineffectual but see others like them enjoying the benefits of successful effort is apt to give rise to self-disparagement and depression. The evident success of similar others makes it hard to avoid self-criticism. In studies instilling different beliefs about personal efficacy and the success of others, belief in one's own inability to secure valued outcomes readily attainable by others of similar standing is most conducive to depressive mood and cognitive debilitation of performance (Bloom, Yates, & Brosvic, 1984; Davis & Yates, 1982).

**Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectancies, and Control**

Outcomes arise from actions. How one behaves largely determines the outcomes one experiences. Performance is thus causally prior to outcomes. Similarly, the outcomes people anticipate depend largely on their judgments of how well they will be able to perform in given situations. To claim, as some writers have (Eastman & Marziller, 1984), that people visualize outcomes and then infer their own capabilities from the imagined outcomes is to invoke a peculiar system of backward causation in which the outcomes that flow from actions are made to precede the actions. People do not judge that they will drown if they jump in deep water and then infer that they must be poor swimmers. Rather, people who judge themselves to be poor swimmers will visualize themselves drowning if they jump in deep water. The causal relationship between beliefs of personal efficacy and outcome expectations is depicted in Figure 1.3. Perceived self-efficacy is a judgment of one's ability to organize and execute given types of performances, whereas an outcome expectation is a judgment of the likely consequence such performances will produce.

Outcome expectations can take three major forms (Bandura, 1986a). Within each form, the positive expectations serve as incentives, the negative ones as disincentives. One distinct class of outcomes is the positive and negative physical effects
that accompany the behavior. These include pleasant sensory experiences and physical pleasures in the positive forms and aversive sensory experiences, pain, and physical discomfort in the negative forms. Human behavior is partly regulated by the social reactions it evokes. Positive and negative social effects form the second major class of outcomes. On the positive side, they include such social reactions of others as expressions of interest, approval, social recognition, monetary compensation, and conferral of status and power; on the negative side, they include disinterest, disapproval, social rejection, censure, deprivation of privileges, and imposed penalties.

Social cognitive theory rejects the crude functionalist view that behavior is regulated solely by external rewards and punishments. If actions were performed only in anticipation of external rewards and punishments, people would behave like weather vanes, constantly shifting direction to conform to whatever influence happened to impinge upon them at the moment. In actuality, people display considerable self-direction in the face of competing influences. Anyone who attempted to change a devoted pacifist into a cruel aggressor or a religious devotee into an atheist would quickly come to appreciate the force of self-reactive influence in the regulation of human behavior. After people adopt personal standards, they regulate their behavior by their self-sanctions. They do things that give them self-satisfaction and a sense of pride and self-worth and refrain from behaving in ways that give rise to self-dissatisfaction, self-devaluation, and self-censure. This third major class of outcomes includes the positive and negative self-evaluative reactions to one’s own behavior. To use an athletic example, the belief that one can high-jump seven feet in an athletic contest is a self-efficacy judgment, not an expected outcome. The anticipated social recognition, applause, trophies, monetary prizes, and self-satisfaction if such a jump represents a superior attainment, and the anticipated social disappointment, forfeiture of material rewards, and self-criticism if it represents a deficient level of attainment, constitute the outcome expectations. A comprehensive functionalist view encompasses all these different forms of outcomes.

As conventionally defined, a performance is an accomplishment; an outcome is something that follows from it. In short, an outcome is the consequence of a performance, not the performance itself. Serious conceptual problems are created when a performance is misconstrued as the outcome of itself, as when jumping seven feet is viewed as the outcome that flows from it. A performance must be specified by descriptive markers; for example, high jumps of five, six, or seven feet. Remove the specifying markers, and one is left with a nondescript activity. Needless confusion has been introduced into the literature by misinterpreting markers of different levels of performance as the outcomes of the performance (Eastman & Marzillier, 1984). Consider an example in the achievement domain. The letter grades of A, B, C, D, and F are markers of different levels of performance, not outcomes. Performance grade levels do not come with a fixed set of outcomes. Performances at the A level may bring self-satisfaction and social approval in circles that value academic achievement but social censure in subgroups of peers who devalue academic achievement and are quick to ridicule, harass, and ostracize academic achievers (Ogbu, 1990; Solomon, 1992).

The markers of different performance levels vary depending on the domain of functioning. In
academic achievement, the marker may be letter grades or percentile ranks; in health-related behavior, the amount of change achieved in weight, exercise, smoking, or nutritional habits; in phobic behavior, the level of threat that is managed; in athletic activities, the speed or accuracy of performance; and in organizational functioning, the level of group productivity. But in no case is the marker of different performance levels an outcome expectation. The motivating potential of anticipated outcomes is, of course, determined largely by the subjective value placed on them. Two people may believe that a given behavioral attainment will produce a particular outcome but evaluate the attractiveness of that outcome quite differently.

Those who misconstrue a performance marker as the outcome of itself launch themselves on an endless performance regress. In the high-jump example, a six-foot leap becomes the "outcome" of a prior pattern of muscular activity, which in turn becomes an "outcome" brought about by a prior activity regulating the muscular exertion, which in turn becomes an "outcome" that is brought about by something else the agent did antecedently, and so it goes on and on endlessly with each attainment being an "outcome" of its precursor, which then becomes an "outcome" of its precursor! Similarly, an A level of academic performance becomes an "outcome" of a certain level of study behavior, but then the study behavior itself becomes an "outcome" of something else the student did to bring it about.

The conceptual confusion caused by converting part of a performance sequence into an outcome can be illustrated in another way. Behavior and the effects it produces are different classes of events. The latter can be used to influence the former. That is, behavior can be altered by the outcomes it gives rise to, be they physical, social, or self-evaluative effects. Rechristening an attainment marker as an outcome creates a logically and procedurally impossible predicament when one is asked to raise academic performance to the A level through contingent use of outcomes. Such a task would require using an A level performance (the alleged outcome) to produce an A level performance! The misconstrual of a performance attainment as an outcome of itself and the resulting infinite regress problem can be easily avoided simply by centering the inquiry on the physical, social, and self-evaluative outcomes that flow from a given performance attainment.

Weight loss is another example of the conceptual and operational distinction between attainments and outcomes. People do not struggle to shed pounds just to shed pounds. They do so for the resulting outcomes, which include physical health benefits, social benefits, and self-evaluative benefits. If weight loss had no physical effects whatsoever, if others couldn't care less whether individuals arevelte or plump, and if their weight had no bearing on their self-satisfaction, people would not go around starving themselves endlessly solely to lose weight (the alleged outcome). The weight-reduction and diet industries would promptly go out of business. This is the conceptual muddle created by misinterpreting an attainment marker as an outcome of its prior self. If researchers choose to construe a performance marker as an outcome, this construal is their conceptual and methodological problem to defend. A view of outcomes that self-efficacy theory categorically rejects should not be foisted on it and then portrayed as its problem in separating performances from outcomes.

Self-efficacy theory distinguishes degrees of controllability by personal means. Controllability affects the extent to which efficacy beliefs shape outcome expectancies and how much outcome expectancies add incrementally to prediction of performance. There is no single relationship between efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies. It depends on how tightly contingencies between actions and outcomes are structured, either inherently or socially, in a given domain of functioning. In activities where outcomes are highly contingent on quality of performance, the types of outcomes people anticipate depend largely on how well they believe they will be able to perform in given situations. For example, students do not expect to be showered with academic honors for a low level of
scholarship. Athletes who concede that they cannot triumph over formidable opponents do not expect to capture top prizes in contests with them. In most social, intellectual, and physical pursuits, those who judge themselves highly efficacious will expect favorable outcomes, whereas those who expect poor performances of themselves will conjure up negative outcomes.

Where performance determines outcome, efficacy beliefs account for most of the variance in expected outcomes. When differences in efficacy beliefs are controlled, the outcomes expected for given performances make little or no independent contribution to prediction of behavior. This is true for diverse spheres of functioning, including academic attainments (Barling & Abel, 1983; Lent, Lopez, & Bieschke, 1991; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989), social behavior (Gresham, Evans, & Elliott, 1988), weight management (Shannon et al., 1990), health habits (Carey, Kaba, Carey, Halperin, & Richards, 1993; Godding & Glasgow, 1985), pain management (Jensen, Turner, & Romano, 1991; Lackner, Carosella, & Feuerstein, 1996; Williams & Kinney, 1991), phobic behavior (Lee, 1984a,b; Williams & Watson, 1985), premature attrition from counseling (Longo, Lent, & Brown, 1992), occupational performance (Barling & Beattie, 1983), and choice of cultural milieu in which to pursue one's occupation (Singer, 1993).

Lack of independent predictiveness does not mean that outcome expectations are unimportant to human behavior. Rather, where efficacy beliefs foretell the expected outcomes, the outcomes become a redundant predictor. Redundancy of predictors, however, should not be misinterpreted as indifference to expected outcomes. The fact that students' perceived scholastic efficacy determines whether or not they expect to gain academic awards does not mean that they place no value on academic awards or are not motivated by them. It is because people see outcomes as contingent on the adequacy of their performance, and care about those outcomes, that they rely on efficacy beliefs in deciding which course of action to pursue and how long to pursue it. They avoid pursuits that they believe they cannot perform successfully and that they anticipate will invite trouble for them, but they actively pursue activities that they judge they can manage successfully and that hold promise of valued rewards. In short, people take action when they hold efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations that make the effort seem worthwhile. They expect given actions to produce desired outcomes and believe that they can perform those actions.

Efficacy beliefs account for only part of the variation in expected outcomes when outcomes are not completely controlled by quality of performance. This partial separation occurs when factors extraneous to quality of performance also affect outcomes or when outcomes are socially tied to a minimum level of performance, so that further variations in quality of performance above the standard do not produce differential outcomes. For example, the prizes granted by equestrian judges may be influenced by the attractiveness of the horse as well as by the skill of the rider. In work situations, compensation is often fixed to some normative performance standard, but a higher level of productivity does not bring larger weekly paychecks. Belief that one can do the job at the required level will produce better expected outcomes than will disbelief in one's efficacy to meet that level. Belief that one can perform above the minimal standard, however, would not give rise to different expected outcomes. And belief that one cannot meet the minimal standard would produce expectations of unemployment in that activity.

Expected outcomes are independent of efficacy beliefs when contingencies are restrictively structured so that no level of competence by certain groups can produce desired outcomes. This independence occurs in pursuits that are rigidly segregated by sex, race, age, or some other factor. Under such circumstances, people in the excluded group expect uniformly negative outcomes however efficacious they judge themselves to be. During the era when professional sports were rigidly segregated by race, minority baseball players could not gain entry to the major leagues and receive lucrative financial payments no matter how well they pitched or batted. After the social barrier was removed, perceived efficacy pretty much prescribed the expected outcomes.
Self-Guidance by Envisioned Possible Selves

Markus and her associates provide an agentic theory of self-conception that assigns an influential regulative function to envisioned possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In this view, people conjure up specific self-images of future successes and failures. These possible selves are constructed from personal experiences, the vast array of actual and symbolic models, and sociocultural influences that shape life pursuits. Possible selves that are well-articulated serve several functions. They provide a conceptual framework for interpreting our experiences. They influence the way we think about our potential and options. And they guide our courses of action and motivate our pursuit of selected goals. Self-images serve this function well when they are elaborated to include the relevant plans and procedural strategies for realizing desired futures. Ill-defined possible selves remain but idle fantasies. The nonprescriptiveness of indefinite selves is captured well in a theatrical portrayal of a character who never quite manages to get her act together (Wagner, 1987). Reflecting on her unrealized ambitions leads her to the incontrovertible insight: "All my life I've always wanted to be somebody. But I see now I should have been more specific."

In this conceptual scheme, people's personal repertoires contain a variety of possible selves that reflect their hopes and fears. Positive selves motivate and guide people to realize desired futures. By themselves, unwanted and feared selves can block action or prompt avoidance of what one is afraid of becoming. If combined with positive images, however, they can serve as additional motivators to do what is needed to avoid envisioned unwanted futures or to prepare to cope with them. Because of the additive motivational effect, the balance of positive and negative possible selves may be more influential in shaping the desired self than either the positive or negative visualized selves alone. Social circumstances activate certain subsets of possible selves that, in turn, promote the patterns of behavior appropriate to creating the desired self.

Markus and her colleagues regard anticipatory cognitive simulation as the key mechanism by which self-images get translated into behavioral competencies (Markus, Cross, & Wurf, 1990). On the assumption that perception, imagery, and action have parallel structural properties, they presume that cognitive simulation coordinates perceptual and action schemata. Viewed from the sociocognitive perspective, however, it is the individual, rather than similarities of neurophysiological structure, that forges the linkage between thought and action, often through laborious effort. If structural similarities led to automatic translation of cognitive schemata into action schemata, the development of competencies would be an easy matter. One would need only to visualize a skill to have it arise behaviorally. In actuality, proficiency is usually achieved through a long, arduous process, especially where complex skills are involved. An interpretation in terms of cross-modal coordination of perceptual and action schemata leaves unexplained the transformational mechanism by which cognition is converted into proficient action.

One solution that is widely accepted for the transformation problem relies on a dual knowledge system: declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (Anderson, 1980). Declarative knowledge supplies the appropriate factual information; procedural knowledge supplies production systems embodying decision rules for solving tasks. Construing the acquisition of competence in terms of factual and procedural knowledge is well suited for cognitive problem solving where solutions are cognitively generated and no actions are involved or are trivially simple. One must distinguish between knowledge and performance skills, however. A novice given complete factual information about how to ski and a full set of procedural rules, then launched from a mountaintop, would most likely end up in an orthopedic ward or intensive care unit of the local infirmary. Procedural knowledge alone will not convert novices into proficient violinists, captivating orators, or graceful ballerinas. Activities requiring the construction and adept execution of complex skills call for additional mechanisms to get from knowledge structures to proficient action. Procedural knowledge and cognitive skills are
necessary but not sufficient for competent performance.

In social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986a), the mechanism for transforming thought into action operates through a conception-matching process. Conceptions of skills serve as guides for developing competencies and as internal standards for improving them. Conceptions are rarely transformed into appropriate performances without error on initial attempts. Skilled performances are usually achieved by repeated corrective adjustments of enactments to the guiding conception as the skills are being behaviorally constructed and improved (Carroll & Bandura, 1987, 1990). Observing one's enactments provides the information needed to detect and correct mismatches between conception and action. If people do not monitor what they are doing, efforts to implement a good conception will not produce proficient action.

A theory cast in terms of multiple selves plunges one into deep philosophical waters. It requires a regess of selves to a presiding superordinate self that selects and manages the collection of possible selves to suit given purposes. Actually, there is only one self that can visualize different desired and undesired futures and select courses of action designed to attain cherished futures and escape feared ones. Actions are regulated by a person, not by a cluster of selves doing the choosing and guiding. The desired future self bears close likeness to distal life goals, and the more proximal working self-concept resembles the short-run subgoals through which distal aspirations are realized. Aspirations combine with self-appraisal of capabilities in shaping life courses. People's beliefs in their personal efficacy determine the life pursuits they foresee from consideration, as well as those they choose to follow and their level of interest, staying power, and success in them (Lent & Hackett, 1987).

The fractionation of selves poses additional conceptual problems because once one starts fractionating the self, where does one stop? For example, an athletic self can be split into an envisioned tennis self and a golfing self. These separable selves, in turn, have their subordinates. Thus, a golfing self can be subdivided into different facets of the athletic ability to include a driving self, a fairway self, a sand-trapped self, and a putting self. How does one decide where to stop fractionating selves? Here, too, there is only one self that can aspire to perfect different sets of subskills encompassed by an envisioned multifaceted pursuit. Diversity arises not from a collection of agentive selves but from the different options considered by the one and the same agentive self.

People striving to realize an envisioned desired self guide and motivate their efforts through a set of self-regulatory mechanisms. These are governed by appraisal of personal capabilities for different pursuits, long-range aspiration merged with proximal subgoals that lead to its fulfillment, positive and negative outcome expectations for different life courses, the value placed on those envisioned outcomes, and the perceived environmental constraints and opportunity structures. These represent some of the influential sociocognitive determinants of the courses that lives take. One and the same person exercises these self-influences differentially in different activity domains and in different social contexts.

The research on self-images has centered mainly on the blend of positive and negative possible selves in people who differ in modes of adaptation and on how envisioned selves affect the processing of information and recruitment of imagery. Those who are coping well have a balanced mixture of possible self-images, whereas people who are exhibiting problems of adaptation envision predominantly negative selves. To date, the causal link of envisioned selves to motivation and behavior has received much less attention. The central question is whether assessment of possible selves contributes to prediction of future behavior beyond the prediction provided by the set of sociocognitive determinants mentioned above. The sociocognitive approach specifies how to influence life courses as well as predict them.

Control Beliefs

A control event consists of an agent using certain means to produce performance attainments that give rise to various outcomes. Skinner and her
colleagues provide a conceptualization of perceived control that divides this fourfold sequence into three segments (Skinner, 1991; Skinner, Chapman, & Baltes, 1988). This segmentation produces three sets of beliefs about the exercise of control. Agency beliefs refer to whether one possesses or has access to the appropriate means. The means include effort, ability, luck, and the influence of powerful others or unknown factors. Means-ends beliefs refer to whether these means are effective in producing desired events or preventing undesired ones. Control beliefs refer to whether one can produce desired events or avoid undesired ones independent of any means. This view of perceived control essentially adds an actor to the standard causal factors proposed by attribution theory. As noted earlier, lack of control may arise from personal incapabilities or the social structure of outcome contingencies. These two different loci of control are distinguished in social cognitive theory because they have different motivational, affective, and behavioral effects and indicate whether personal or social remedies are required.

The tripartite scheme creates a number of conceptual puzzles about the different aspects and sources of control. To begin with, the scheme includes only three of the four essential elements in the exercise of control. The nature of the missing element depends on how “ends” are conceptualized. If positive and negative events represent the rewarding and punishing outcomes that flow from performance attainments, then performance is missing from the tripartite scheme. Means do not operate on outcomes directly. Rather, means give rise to certain performances that then produce outcomes. It is not that effort as a means brings book royalties, but that effort produces novels that bring book royalties. I could hardly write to my publisher demanding royalties because I expended tremendous effort without producing a book. If positive and negative ends represent variations in performance attainments, then the tripartite scheme is missing outcomes. Behavior is not created and executed purposelessly. People strive to exercise behavioral control to secure valued outcomes and to prevent or escape undesired ones. In the tripartite scheme, positive and negative ends are measured in terms of variations in level of academic performance. As noted earlier, high and low grades are markers of performance attainment, not outcomes. The same academic performance may bring rewarding or punishing outcomes depending on the value system to which performers and their reference groups subscribe.

In addition to the omission of outcomes from the control sequence, there is the problem of means. Some of the means proposed by Skinner are things people can do (effort), others are things they presumably have (ability), and still others are external forces wielding unspecified influence, such as powerful others and luck. Or they are simply unknown determinants of outcomes. To regard chance happenings as a means at one’s disposal to produce performance attainments or outcomes creates conceptual problems. Luck may be regarded as a force that shapes events, but good or bad fortune is not a means one controls. Thus, luck leaves agents with no personal control over their experiences. Outcomes happen to them through inexplicable good or bad fortune rather than being the result of purposeful actions. Agency must be defined in terms of doing, not undergoing (Thulberg, 1972).

Social cognitive theory subscribes to a more dynamic conception of means and a view of operative agency. Operative agency involves more than just possessing different categories of means, as conceived in the tripartite scheme. Means are not fixed entities that one possesses. Effective exercise of control requires the orchestration of knowledge, sub-skills, and resources to manage changing situations. Means encompass not only cognitive and behavioral skills but also emotional and motivational self-regulative skills for enlisting motivation and managing disruptive emotional arousal. Moreover, the results people produce depend on how well they use available means as well as the potential utility of those means. The implementive aspect is an integral part of agency. Hence, people with the same means may perform adeptly or poorly under taxing circumstances because their efficacy beliefs affect how well they use the means at their disposal (Bandura, 1990a). In these instances, the problem is not
the lack of means but the inadequate way in which they are applied. The operative aspect of control accords with the traditional definition of agency as the power to produce outcomes rather than as the mere possession of a set of means.

There are also major conceptual problems with control beliefs. How can an agent stripped of all means exercise control over outcomes? This would be analogous to immaculate conception. When people are asked, without suggesting any means, whether they can attain desired outcomes, they undoubtedly consider on their own the means they have at their disposal in making their judgments. In short, they add means to their exercise of agency. There are two principal ways in which people can exercise control: through direct personal control and through socially mediated proxy control. In direct personal control, people mobilize the skills and resources at their command to produce the performances that secure desired outcomes. In proxy control, they exercise influence over others who get them the desired outcomes. Gaining outcomes through intermediaries involves the exercise of agency just as it does in direct control, but proxy control banks heavily on persuasion or social coercion. Although the alternative forms of control require different types of means, both are agentic.

People may believe that good or bad things will happen to them either fortuitously or through the actions of power holders, divine agencies, or other types of supreme beings. But whether such happenings involve control beliefs depends on whether people regard the outcomes as occurring independently of anything they do or as somehow influenced by their effect on the ruling agents. Some people try to exert influence on the supernatural agents of their faith by praying to their deities, performing rituals or making material offerings to them, and behaving in ways they believe will avoid deistic punishments and bring worldly rewards or a blessed afterlife.

In their everyday lives, people repeatedly produce effects by their actions. Because they make all kinds of things happen in their immediate environment, there is every reason for them to believe that their actions will continue to have at least some effect in whatever new situations they may encounter. Langer (1983) has shown that people are easily insinuated into believing they exercise some control even over outcomes determined entirely by chance events, if the activities include elements that ordinarily increase the likelihood of success on tasks of skill. For example, being given a choice or being allowed active participation and practice on chance tasks, even though this has no effect on what will happen, creates a cognitive set that carrying out these rituals of skill will provide some measure of control over chance outcomes. Apparently, people feel confident that, by their actions, they have gained some influence over chance happenings. If they believe they exert no influence on what is happening to them, however, they do not view the situation as involving personal agency.

In sum, when people are asked, in the tripartite assessments, to judge their control over life events without reference to means, they undoubtedly supply their own means in situations where they can exercise direct personal control, invoke proxy control when they have to depend on intermediaries to get what they want, or operate under an illusion of agency. They must unite agency with means; otherwise, control beliefs reduce to wishful thinking that, somehow, good things will happen without the exertion of any causal influence.

In tests of predictive power, agency beliefs predict children’s academic performance, whereas control beliefs and means-end beliefs bear little or no relation to performance (Chapman, Skinner, & Baltes, 1990; Little, Lopez, Oettingen, & Baltes, 1995). The strength of the relationship between agency beliefs and performance increases with age. These findings are consistent with other lines of evidence supporting the predictive superiority of efficacy beliefs over outcome expectations. Beliefs about the effectiveness of particular types of means will not drive individuals to success if they are beset with doubts that they can develop the required means or use them skillfully in situations fraught with difficulties. Nor will individuals drive themselves to success solely by visions of good happenings without any effort or ingenuity on their part.

Weiss and Cameron (1985) segment the control process into the usual two components:
perceived capability and action-outcome expectancies. They have examined how conceptions of control change developmentally as a joint function of these two belief systems. Young children have difficulty distinguishing between outcomes caused by chance events and those that are personally controllable. As they gain knowledge about causality, they increasingly recognize that actions affect outcomes probabilistically rather than invariantly because outcomes are often the product of interacting factors that are changeable across time, places, and circumstances. With growing self-knowledge and inferential capabilities, children get better at assessing the extent to which motivation and skill, as opposed to chance events, affect the controllability of outcomes. In judging their capabilities, children change from an exaggerated sense of competence to a more modest view of their capabilities as they mature.

Interpreting developmental trends in the accuracy with which children judge their capabilities requires caution. Research often confounds the influence of two factors: the self-appraisal of capabilities and the knowledge of task demands. Perceived capability may exceed performance for three reasons. Children may exhibit inflated performance expectations because they overestimate their capabilities, they judge their capabilities accurately but underestimate the task demands, or they harbor both types of misjudgments. As children mature, they gain increasing familiarity with the level of task demands and the types of skills the tasks require, as well as knowledge about their own capabilities. Over time, they may become more realistic because they understand the complexities of their environment better, rather than because they are losing a sense of omnipotence. This is an issue to which we will return later.

Primary versus Secondary Control

People may use their efficacy to adapt to their environment or to change it. Some theorists characterize efforts to change existing realities as primary control and accommodation to them as secondary control (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982). Secondary control includes two aspects: adapting to existing realities and ameliorating distress over them. The distinction between personal adaptation and social change is a useful one, but they are not mutually exclusive. Nor should they be invested with differential inherent status, as the terms primary and secondary would seem to imply. In the dual view, people first try to change the environment; when their efforts fail, they resign themselves to fitting in with it. Weisz and his colleagues liken this distinction to Piaget’s (1979) theory of cognitive development wherein cognitive incongruities are resolved by assimilation or accommodation. In assimilation, people interpret reality in ways that fit their existing beliefs; in accommodation, they change their existing beliefs to fit with reality. In the dual conceptual scheme, the alternative forms of control are invested with different values and emotional consequences. In primary control, people presumably enjoy satisfying triumphs; in secondary control, they try to make the best of an unchangeable reality and to lessen the negative emotional impact of crushing defeats.

The traditional distinction between primary and secondary control is not without its problems. The portrayal of adaptational control is stereotypically narrow, the affective consequences of adaptation and social change are incompletely represented, and the Piagetian analogy is ill-fitting. In both forms of Piagetian cognitive adjustment, people try to fit themselves to an incongruent perceived reality either by reconceiving it or by altering their views to match it. In neither case are they altering the physical or social environment itself. By contrast, in the exercise of so-called primary control, people actually change the character of the environment rather than merely view it differently. There is a world of difference between intrapsychic change and social change.

Adaptation is not necessarily subordinately acquiescent and environmental change preeminently exalting. The conception of secondary control portrays accommodation to existing realities as acquiescent adaptation born of vanquishing defeat. But acquiescence is only one form of adaptation to
existing realities. Many efforts to fulfill the role and
task demands of life pursuits, which represent adap-
tations to social systems, are motivated by aspiration
and rewarded by improvements in competencies
and the satisfactions of a job well done. Adaptation
in the service of self-development is not a consola-
tory fallback strategy. Both adaptation and environ-
mental change require skills and the self-regulatory
efficacy to achieve success. If one already possesses
the competencies to fulfill the demands of an exist-
ing environmental system, adaptation is mainly a
process of exercising one's capabilities. If, however,
one lacks the necessary knowledge and competen-
cies, as when fulfilling new occupational role re-
quirements, adaptation is a lengthy, complex
process of self-development. Effective adaptation to
existing realities requires the exercise of control
over the demands of those realities rather than the
abdication of control. For example, in accommodat-
ing to their fixed roles, routes, and time sched-
ules, airline pilots must be vigilantly controlling.
Thus, adaptations requiring mastery of new com-
petencies promote self-development, and successful
fulfillment of roles provides a sense of personal ac-
complishment. Indeed, the more closely a person's
interest and skills match those of the most success-
ful members of a given occupation, the greater is
his or her satisfaction with the chosen pursuit (Hol-
lund, 1985). Just as adaptation is not confined to
joyless acquiescence, environmental changes are
not always satisfying successes. Changes made with
faulty forethought of consequences can create more
problems and distress than the changes were in-
tended to remedy. Even beneficial social changes
are not free of problems.

One can distinguish between the exercise of
control over the demands of existing realities and
the exercise of control over the emotional impact of
those realities. But that is a difference in what is be-
ing controlled, not between personal adaptation
and social change. Social change efforts call for
high efficacy to manage perturbing emotions be-
cause the pathways to changing the character of
the environment are usually strewn with institu-
tional barriers, stiff social resistance from vested in-
terests, and even coercive threats and punishments.

Typically, those who attempt to shape future real-
ities have to manage more severe personal distress —
caused by the opposing social reactions to their
change efforts — than those who seek to adapt to ex-
isting realities. Social changers must struggle to
overcome their frustrations, apprehensions, uncer-
tainties, self-doubts, and despair to keep going in
the face of aversive obstacles and social resistance.
It is not that changers are serene alters of environ-
ments with occasional disappointments and
adapters are busily tranquilizing personal distress
over fitting in with the world around them. To fur-
ther complicate matters, people must act together
to accomplish most forms of social change, rather
than try to do it by themselves. The eventual out-
comes of attempts at social change remain highly
uncertain, so it does not take much adversity to
convince people of the futility of further effort.
Although personal adaptation and social change in-
volve many common processes, changing estab-
lished environments requires some additional forms
of personal efficacy.

Much of what gets included under secondary
control is concerned with exercising influence over
one's thinking to reduce the aversiveness of life situa-
tions that are perceived to be exceedingly difficult
to modify. The cognitive strategies for ameliorating
stress take a variety of forms (Pearlin & Schooler,
1978). They may involve retrenching aspiration,
lowering expectations, making the best of existing
realities by finding something positive in them,
comparing one's own difficulties favorably with the
plight of others, viewing one's current life circum-
cstances as an improvement over the past or as a
forerunner of a better future, reorganizing one's pri-
orities, or maintaining an optimistic faith in one's
future. The self-regulation of vexing emotions is not
conined to positive reappraisals of bleak realities or
refuge in escapist activities. Life is multifaceted.
Even under the most difficult conditions, there are
some aspects of life that are personally controllable.
The exercise of behavioral control over events that
impact one's life is a powerful way to regulate emo-
tional states. The achievement of valued changes
brings satisfactions, and the lessening of problems
that one can control brings relief from stress and
despair. Focus on the controllable aspects of one’s life makes the uncontrollable ones more bearable.

The relationship between individuals and their social environment is reciprocally deterministic, not independent (Bandura, 1986a). They create each other. Human transactions produce changing levels of reciprocity and balances of power. If people acquiesce to environmental dictates, they relinquish power to authorities and thereby make the institutional environment more powerful. Silence gives consent. To paraphrase Edmund Burke, the only thing necessary for tyrants to triumph is for good people to do nothing. Because adaptation involves two-way influence rather than merely a one-way personal accommodation to an autonomous environment, even in acquiescing people are changing the environment, though clearly without intending to do so. Moreover, no two individuals adapting to the same objective environment do so in exactly the same way. They may adapt grudgingly, apathetically, agreeably, or eagerly. Different styles of adaptation produce different environments.

In short, human functioning is not neatly compartmentalized into changing the environment or changing oneself, nor is personal change necessarily a fallback from failure in social change. People cannot be dichotomized solely into adapters or changers, because the environment is multifaceted rather than a uniform mass. In seeking to alter their environment, people adapt to the aspects they like while at the same time trying to change the aspects they find undesirable. In effecting social change, people have to change themselves by developing the beliefs and skills needed to do so and to manage the aversive emotional effects generated by antagonistic counterreactions to their efforts. Thus, human adaptation and change are better explained by the dynamic interplay of different coping strategies than by the categorization of strategies into types and the binding of types to particular adaptational outcomes. The categorical approach spawns varied assortments of typologies and disputes over which version is the superior one. We will revisit this issue in analyzing the distinction between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

**Self-Efficacy in Individualistic and Collectivistic Social Systems**

People live their lives in sociocultural environments that differ in their shared values, social practices, and opportunity structures. Cultures that are individually oriented tend to favor self-initiative and pursuit of self-interest, whereas those that are collectively oriented place group interest and shared responsibility above self-interest (Triandis, 1995). However, these global classifications mask much diversity and variability. Bicultural contrasts, in which a single collectivistic culture is compared to a single individualistic one, can spawn a lot of misleading generalizations. To begin with, the dichotomization of cultures rests on a questionable uniformity assumption. Although collectivistic systems, such as East Asian ones founded on Confucianism or Buddhism, favor a communal ethic, they differ significantly from each other in particular values, meanings, and customs they promote (Kim, Triandis, Kâğıtçıbaşı, Choi, Yoon, 1994). Nor are so-called individualistic cultures a uniform lot. Americans, Italians, Germans, and the British differ in their particular brands of individualism. Even within an individualistically oriented culture, such as the United States, the New England brand of individualism is quite different from the Californian version or that of the Southern region of the nation. In addition to the diversity within and between cultures placed in the same category, even members of the same national culture adopt different orientations depending on social circumstances. Thus, for example, members of collectivistically oriented societies are highly communal with ingroup members but not so with outgroup members. But in the presence of negative sanctions against free riders they become as communal with outsiders as do people in individualistic cultures (Yamagishi, 1988). Thus, people express their cultural orientation conditionally rather than invariably. Both intracultural and situational variation in styles of behavior underscore the need to specify mechanisms through which cultural influences exert their effects. Cultural orientations must be treated as multifaceted dynamic influences in explorations of how
efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning within independent and interdependent social systems. People live their lives neither entirely autonomously nor entirely interdependently in any society. They do many things independently but must also work together to achieve desired results. Interdependence does not obliterate a personal self. Self-conceptions embody both personal and collective facets, although their relative emphasis will vary depending on the type of culture in which people are raised. Efficacy beliefs have a similar multifaceted character.

Some writers regard any reference to "self" as reflecting a pernicious individualistic bias in psychological theorizing and pit the self against collectivism. In this jaundiced view, the exercise of personal control is portrayed as an act of self-indulgence. For example, Seligman (1990) christened this allegedly self-centered character as the "California self." In point of fact, personal efficacy can serve varied purposes, many of which subordinate self-interest to the benefits of others. Gandhi provides a striking example of self-sacrifice in the exercise of commanding personal efficacy. He spearheaded the triumph over oppressive rule through unceasing nonviolent resistance and repeatedly forced concessions from ruling authorities by going on life-threatening fasts. He lived ascetically, not self-indulgently. Without a resilient sense of self, people are easily overwhelmed by adversities in their attempts to improve their group life through collective effort.

Because efficacy beliefs involve self-referent processes, self-efficacy is sometimes inappropriately equated with individualism (Schooler, 1990). But a high sense of personal efficacy is just as important to group-directedness as to self-directedness. In collectively oriented systems, people work together to produce the benefits they seek. Group pursuits are no less demanding of personal efficacy than individual pursuits. Nor do people who work interdependently in collectivistic societies have less desire to be efficacious in the particular roles they perform than do those in individualistic societies. Personal efficacy is valued not because of reverence for individualism but because a strong sense of personal efficacy is vital for successful adaptation and change regardless of whether they are achieved individually or by group members putting their personal capabilities to the best collective use. A firm group loyalty creates strong personal obligations to do one's part in group pursuits as efficaciously as one can. Members are respected for their personal contributions to group accomplishments. Efficacy beliefs operate in complex, multifaceted ways, however the cultural pursuits are socially structured. All too often the complexities and subtleties get lost in oversimplified cross-cultural comparisons.

Group achievements and social change are rooted in self-efficacy. The research of Earley (1993; 1994) attests to the cultural universality of the functional value of efficacy beliefs. Universality does not mean a culture-free perspective. Belief in one's ability to produce desired effects fosters accomplishments in all cultures. But cultural values and practices affect how efficacy beliefs are developed, the purposes to which they are put and the way in which they are best exercised in particular cultural milieus. Thus, in cross-cultural analyses, efficacy beliefs contribute to the productivity of members of both collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Individualists are most efficacious and productive when they can manage things themselves, whereas collectivists are most efficacious and productive when they manage things together. Collectivists, however, tend to be wary of outsiders and are therefore not invariably group oriented. Indeed, collectivists have a low sense of efficacy and perform poorly in an ethnically mixed group.

The influence of individualistic and collectivistic orientations on performance operates largely through beliefs of personal and group efficacy and their motivational impact. The debates on this topic often ignore the significant variations within cultures, which are often at least as interesting as the modal variations between cultures. Efficacy beliefs function as regulative influences for collectivists in individualistic societies and individualists in collectivistic societies, regardless of whether orientations are analyzed at the cultural level or at the individual level. Earley's informative studies
debunk the simplistic view that efficacy beliefs are wedded solely to Western individualism. The way in which a society is structured does not say much about how well its members perform activities when the influence of their perceived personal and group efficacy is factored out.

The cross-cultural generality of the adaptive functions of efficacy beliefs is evident in emotional well-being as well as in motivation and action. A low sense of coping efficacy is just as occupationally debilitating and stressful in collectivist cultures as in individualistic ones (Matsui & Ong, 1992). People who are wracked with self-doubt do not become social reformers or inspiring mentors, leaders, and social innovators. Because social reformers encounter considerable resistance and retaliatory threats, they must have a tenacious belief in their ability to produce social change through collective effort. If they do not believe in themselves, they are unlikely to empower others with the belief that they can successfully confront and change conditions that affect their lives adversely. The same is true for other members of a group or social system. Inveterate self-doubters are not easily organized into a collectively efficacious force. Indeed, a collectivistic society, populated with members who are consumed by self-doubts about their capabilities and who anticipate the futility of any effort to shape their future, would be condemned to a dismal existence.

**Enablement versus Moralization**

Some writers express ambivalence over the notion that people make causal contributions to their lives for fear that they will get blamed for their problems (Myers, 1990). Victimization is, of course, a common social practice that gives much concern. The belief that acknowledgment of human efficacy may invite victimization, however, rests on a simplistic view of causal processes laced with moralistic overtones. Self-efficacy is concerned with human enablement, not with moral judgments. If people harbor beliefs that are self-hampering, it does not mean that the problem is exclusively an individual one and that the solution lies solely in personal change.

Human behavior is multidetermined by the reciprocal interplay of personal and environmental influences. People make causal contributions to their lives, but they are not the sole causes of their destinies. Numerous other influences—some social, some geographical, and some institutional—also contribute to the courses our lives take. Human life paths are thus determined by multi-authored influences. Within this multicausality, people can improve their lives by exercising influence in areas over which they have some control. The more they bring their influence to bear on changeable conditions that affect their lives, the more they contribute to their own futures. Ideological prohibition against recognizing that behavior is codetermined by the dynamic interplay of personal and social influences is self-defeating.

People change their lives for the better not only through self-development but by acting together to alter adverse institutional practices. If the practices of social systems impede or undermine the personal development of some sectors of society, then a large part of the solution lies in changing the adverse practices of social systems through the exercise of collective efficacy. To shape their social future, people must believe themselves capable of accomplishing significant social change, which rarely comes easily. In the words of John Gardner, “Getting things done socially is no sport for the short-winded.” Regardless of whether efforts are directed at personal or social betterment, the overriding message of self-efficacy theory is enablement, not personal blame. Personal and social change are complementary rather than rival approaches to improving the quality of life. Because social change is a slow, tortuous process, people can ill afford to suspend personal control over things they can alter in their lives until societal changes are eventually achieved. Denial that people make any causal contributions to the paths their lives take carries the dispiriting implication that people are powerless to effect any personal changes in their lives. It is a patronizing prescription for apathy and despair.
The Self-Efficacy Component of Social Cognitive Theory

It is important to distinguish between social cognitive theory and the self-efficacy component of the theory, which operates in concert with other determinants in the theory to govern human thought, motivation, and action. Social cognitive theory posits a multifaceted causal structure that addresses both the development of competencies and the regulation of action (Bandura, 1986a). The different classes of determinants and mediating mechanisms are summarized only briefly here because they are extensively reviewed in subsequent chapters. Knowledge structures representing the rules and strategies of effective action serve as cognitive guides for the construction of complex modes of behavior. These knowledge structures are formed from the results of observational learning, exploratory activities, verbal instruction, and innovative cognitive syntheses of acquired knowledge. Knowledge structures are translated into proficient action through transformational and generative operations. Cognitive models serve as guides for the production of skilled action and as internal standards for making corrective adjustments in the development of behavioral proficiency. The situations people have to deal with are rarely, if ever, completely alike. Execution of a skill must be varied to suit changing circumstances and serve varied purposes. Adaptive functioning, therefore, requires generative conceptions that enable individuals to enact skills in a variety of ways rather than in a rigidly fixed fashion.

Cognitive guidance is especially influential in the early and intermediate phases of skill development. Knowledge structures specify how appropriate subskills must be selected, integrated, and sequenced to suit particular purposes. With continued practice, skills become fully integrated and are executed with ease. Human action is regulated by multilevel systems of control. Once proficient modes of behavior become routinized, they no longer require higher cognitive control. Their execution can be regulated largely by lower level sensory-motor systems in managing recurrent task demands, unless something goes awry. In fact, attending to the mechanics of what one is doing after proficiency is achieved is likely to disrupt skilled performance.

Partial disengagement of thought from proficient action has considerable functional value. Having to think about the details of every skilled activity before carrying it out in recurrent situations would consume most of one’s precious attentional and cognitive resources and create a monotonously dull inner life. After people develop adequate ways of managing situations that recur regularly, they act on their perceived efficacy without requiring continuing directive or reflective thought. To cite a familiar example, people rely on their perceived efficacy in choosing what types of traffic situations to get into while they are developing their driving skills. But after they routinize their driving skills, it would be a considerable waste of cognitive resources if they had to continue to reappraise their driving efficacy each time they set forth on a familiar route with their automobile. This does not mean that efficacy belief is an important contributor to skill development but operates as less of a factor after the skill is routinized. Quite the contrary. As long as people continue to believe in their ability to perform a given activity, they act habitually on that belief without having to keep reminding themselves of it. Should they cease to believe in their ability, they would behave differently. If significant changes occur in task demands or situational circumstances, personal efficacy is promptly reappraised as the guide for action under the altered conditions.

Routinization is advantageous when the skills that have been acquired are the optimal ones and remain so under a variety of circumstances. Routinization can detract from the best use of personal capabilities, however, when people react in fixed ways to situations requiring discriminative adaptability. Routinization is also self-limiting when people settle for low-level pursuits on the basis of self-doubts of efficacy and no longer reappraise their capabilities or raise their vision of themselves.

When routinized behavior repeatedly fails to produce expected results, the cognitive control
system again comes into play. Both the behavior and the changing environmental circumstances are monitored to identify the source of the problem. New modes are considered and tested. Control reverts to the lower control system after an adequate mode is found and becomes the habitual way of doing things.

Social cognitive theory encompasses a large set of factors that operate as regulators and motivators of established cognitive, social, and behavioral skills. These factors operate through the anticipative mechanism of forethought. Instrumental thoughts about desired futures tend to promote the type of behavior likely to bring about their realization. Forethought manifests itself in many different ways. Predictive knowledge of what is likely to happen if particular events occur fosters planfulness and foresightful adaptations. The ability to envision the likely outcomes of prospective courses of action is another way in which anticipative mechanisms contribute to human motivation and adaptation. These outcome expectancies may take the form of external outcomes produced by the behavior, vicarious outcomes as observed in the costs and benefits occurring to others, or self-evaluative reactions to one’s own behavior. These different types of outcomes operate in concert to influence the course of human action. Cognized goals and internal standards rooted in value systems create further self-incentives and guides for action through self-regulatory mechanisms.

Perceived self-efficacy occupies a pivotal role in social cognitive theory because it acts upon the other classes of determinants. By influencing the choice of activities and the motivational level, beliefs of personal efficacy make an important contribution to the acquisition of the knowledge structures on which skills are founded. An assured sense of efficacy supports the type of efficient analytic thinking needed to ferret out predictive knowledge from causally ambiguous environments in which many factors combine to produce effects. Beliefs of personal efficacy also regulate motivation by shaping aspirations and the outcomes expected for one’s efforts. A capability is only as good as its execution. The self-assurance with which people approach and manage difficult tasks determines whether they make good or poor use of their capabilities. Insidious self-doubts can easily override the best of skills. Although this book focuses on beliefs of personal efficacy, these beliefs operate within a broad system of multicausality. The next chapter addresses the basic characteristics of efficacy beliefs and the influential role they play in causal structures.
SELF-EFFICACY

The Exercise of Control

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W.H. Freeman and Company
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To: Ginny, Mary, Carol, and my indefatigable pals,
Andy and Timmy