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Morton Deutsch: Major Texts on Peace Psychology

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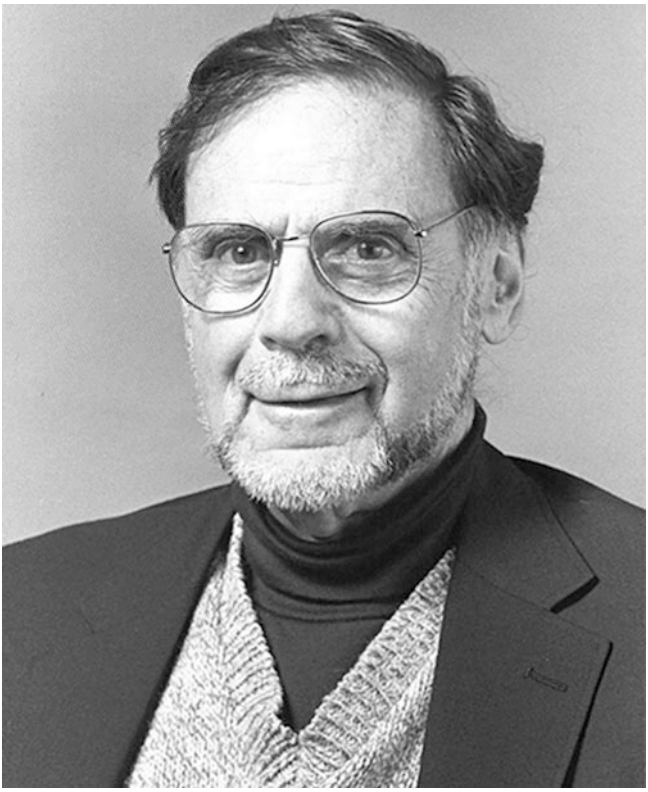

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To our great grandchildren,
may they live in a world
that is congenial, sustainable,
and free of war and destructive conflicts.

Photo of Morton and Lydia Deutsch in Thailand (1998). *Source* Morton Deutsch's personal photo collection

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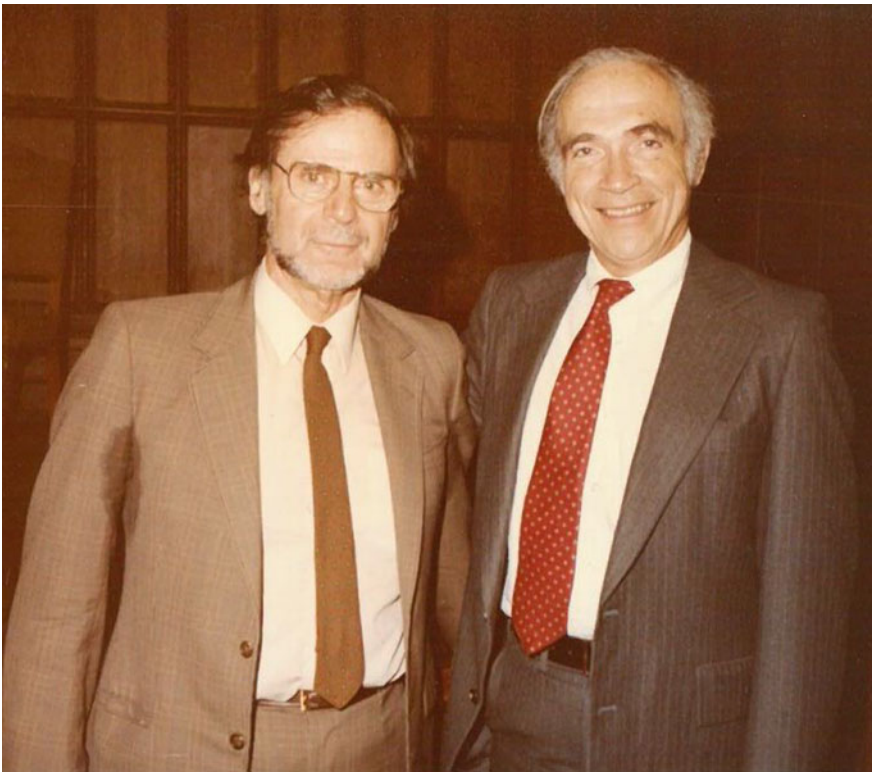

Morton Deutsch wih the President of Teachers College, Larry Cremin, in 1982

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Morton Deutsch with Peter Coleman at the 2013 Morton Deutsch Awards at Teachers College, Columbia University. *Source* From the author's personal photo collection

Chapter 1
Introduction

In this difficult age, in which we all live, with destructive wars, terrorism, climate change, massive poverty, and gross violations of human rights, it is difficult to maintain hope and it is easy to grasp cynicism about the human future. Yet I believe one must maintain hope for a better world and strive to bring it about. The papers in these two volumes reflect this orientation. They also reflect a social psychological approach to issues of war and peace which I believe is important. However these issues require the contributions of many other disciplines as well.

The basic ideas underlying the social psychological orientation of the papers presented in these two volumes involve the following key concepts[1]: interdependence, rationality, open-mindedness, time perspective, constructive conflict resolution, and fallibility. Each of these concepts is briefly discussed below.

1.1 Interdependence

In many ways people, as individuals and in groups, in organizations, in nations, and as members of the human species on planet earth are highly interdependent—"we sink or swim together." Narrowly pursuing one's own interests, one's religious interests, one's national interests—without regard to the interest of others—will often produce mutual harm. This problem is sometimes discussed under the title of "The Commons Dilemma" (Harden 1968). A simple illustration of this dilemma is presented in the figure below.

[1] See Chap. 10 for a fuller discussion.

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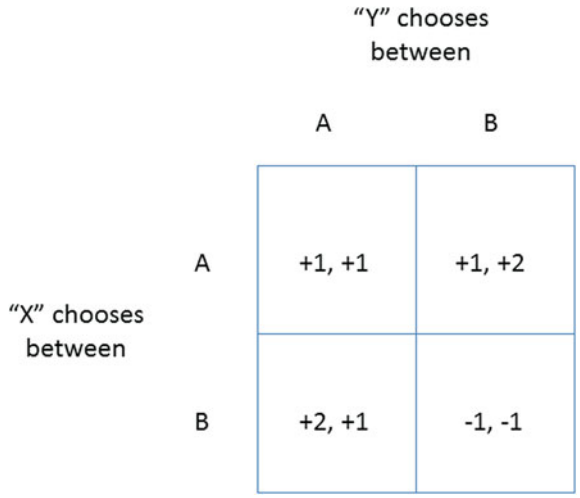

"X" and "Y" can be individuals, groups, or nations. If each chooses "B" (according to their narrow self-interest), both will end up losing. If both choose "A", they each will have a positive outcome. However, if they can agree to alternate choices which most benefit the other, they will do even better.

We live in a highly interdependent world. Namely, our decisions are not made in a vacuum, but rather in our local and global contexts, most often impacting others as well as ourselves. If we (as individuals, groups, or nations) act only in terms of narrow self-interest, the damage to our families, communities, organizations, nations, and planet would be great.

1.2 Rationality

Economic rationality is often considered the basic form of rationality. Thus, it is frequently assumed that a nation's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is the measure of a nation's well-being. In recent years, the GDP has been subjected to two main forms of criticism. One is that economic well-being is only one aspect of well-being; it doesn't include health, happiness, and many other aspects of well-being. Secondly, it doesn't include the harmful side effects of some aspects of economic production such as air pollution and climate change.

Some scholars have suggested that there are various forms of rationality. As Diesing (1962) has indicated, there are five forms of rationality: *technical* (efficient achievement of a single goal); *economic* (efficient achievement of a plurality of goals); *legal* (rules or rule following); *political* (referring to the rationality of decision making structures); and *social* rationality (integrating forces in individuals and social systems which generate meaning and allow action to occur). He defines rationality in terms of effectiveness, and he describes a number of fundamental

kinds of effectiveness in the social world: effectiveness refers to the successful production of any kind of value. A sixth type of rationality has also been added and labeled *ecological* rationality—reasoning that produces, increases or preserves the capacity, resilience and diversity of an ecosystem, or in its largest sense, the biosphere (Bartlett/Robert 1986).

We suggest extending the concept of social rationality to include *community* or *global* rationality. Global rationality could be thought of as decision making that is guided by the effective creation of value for our global community. So, in addition to looking at decisions from technical, economic, legal, political and ecological rationalities, an extension would be to look at decisions in terms of their global rationality, or value in creating or strengthening global community. It is based on the salience of the "interdependence, obligation and solidarity of unique relationships" connecting us to our global identity. An inclusive concept of rationality would go beyond economic rationality. This would require the integration of economic rationality with social (global) rationality and other forms of rationality as is appropriate to the specific situation of decision-making.

We emphasize a broader concept of rationality because a narrow focus on economic rationality as the only form of rationality, encourages an economic orientation to life, material accumulation and greed, and neglects the values inherent in being a member of a lively, meaningful community.

1.3 Open-Mindedness

A major obstacle to overcome in seeking harmonious, peaceful relations is close-mindedness. Close-mindedness is the unwillingness to have contact with, to listen to, to seek out, or to comprehend information that goes against one's beliefs or positions, and the readiness to discard any evidence that does not support one's own views or beliefs.

Can we overcome this challenge and promote open minded discussion among people with opposing viewpoints? Tjosvold et al. (2014) define four mutually reinforcing aspects of open minded discussion: developing and expressing one's own ideas (perspective giving); questioning and understanding other's views and ideas (perspective taking), integrating and synthesizing to generate new perspectives, and agreeing to implement some kind of solution.

Close-mindedness is often best overcome with the help of a highly respected third party who creates a situation in which opposed parties can meet in a friendly, non-threatening context which enables the opposing parties to see the common ground they share despite their initial opposing viewpoints.

1.4 Time Perspective

An orientation to short-term gratification is often detrimental to long term benefits and to the achievement of important future goals. Thus, the potential future, as well as the current harmful effects of climate change are often denied or ignored for the short-term profits involved in producing and using oil and coal. The research and theorizing on the delay of gratification conducted by Walter Mischel and his colleagues over the last several decades provide some insight and understanding into developing an extended time perspective. Mischel and colleagues have investigated the cognitive processes and conditions involved in why people are able to delay gratification or not. We can link the ideas to the commons dilemma. Mischel et al. (2006) suggested that to successfully enable willpower, one must understand two interacting 'systems:' a 'hot' or 'go' system may be understood as that which is emotional, simple, reflexive and fast. We are often well aware of how particular actions will gratify self-interest. In contrast, they propose a 'cool', or 'know' system that is complex, contemplative, strategic, reflective and emotionally neutral. It is this system that, in successful instances of self-control, comes into play to balance the actions of the 'go' system. Relating this to the commons dilemma suggests that learning of ways to increase the activity of the 'know' system can have useful benefits for strengthening decision making that is based on *social rationality* rather than solely on selfish rationality, and it takes the future into account.

Another way of increasing future orientation is to visualize possible futures. Thus, Hershfield et al. (2011) have demonstrated that college students who were shown computer-generated images of themselves as senior citizens had a positive impact on their retirement savings intentions.

1.5 Constructive Conflict Resolution

Conflict has a bad reputation because of its association with such negative effects as violence, war, and destructiveness. However it can have positive effects: improving relations, solving problems, stimulating positive personal and social change and enhancing creativity. Throughout our writings on this we emphasize the imperative to find ways of reducing the over reliance on destructive conflict resolution methods (e.g., use of coercion, violence, power over others, escalation, a win/lose orientation, impoverished communication between parties in conflict, autistic hostility, to name just a few), and of increasing use of constructive conflict techniques. Such techniques as creative problem solving, using active listening methods of communication, reframing the conflict as a joint problem rather than the other's problem, and so forth are important characteristics of constructive conflict resolution. These and other techniques have a solid history of empirical support in moving conflict in a constructive rather than a destructive direction.