# PERCEPTIONS AND PEACE

*Francisco Diez*
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# I.  HOW PERCEPTIONS ARE SHAPED?

## a) Introduction

Thinking and reading at the LSE, I came to some tentative approaches to this question.

The point of view I am going to adopt is that of a practitioner. That is the reason why I will present first a general, more theoretical approach in section I, and then apply and repeat it in sections II and III.

My *hypothesis* is that perceptions have a decisive influence on (maybe dominate) the individuals' behavior. To understand conflict and find ways to influence its course we must work on people's behavior. All of us behave according to our perceptions of our own global reality. Hence, in order to understand and find ways to influence people's behavior, we must understand how perceptions are shaped.

## b) Assumptions

Most of my assumptions are a byproduct of my practice as a mediator in private cases or as a political actor in the government and in the opposition party. They are the following:

1) My first assumption is that conflict is always created, lived, expanded, reduced, managed, escalated, solved and so forth, by individuals, by individual human beings acting for themselves, or as a part of a larger unit (family, political parties, institutions, enterprises, etc.) or representing a small or large group of people (including nation states). The basic common feature of every conflict is the *interaction* among individuals, among different individuals, regardless of the content or the characteristics of the conflict. From this perspective, the basic unit of analysis to look at is the individual and how he functions.

2) The second assumption is the influence of *time*. The past and the sense of the future are always present in human interaction and influence it. Again, there is no fixed pattern about the kind of influence time will have. But anyway, time combined with the dynamism of human functioning, produces change.

3) The third assumption is about the nature of that interaction and how it works amongst individuals.

a) The first characteristic is that it is *complex*. There are no fixed patterns of functioning, no fixed cause and effect relations that can be applied universally to everyone in a given situation. Also, there is no such thing as a "given situation". Nothing is given, because individuals are unique and situations are always different – even when they (individuals and situations) look very similar.

b) The second one is the *dynamic* nature of human functioning. Individuals always act and react, generate – and respond to – diverse stimuli. Situations change according to many different variables and produce related changes. The dynamism of human functioning is given by the continuous movement of relationships among different elements of the individual's internal and external "reality". On the other hand, because of the dynamism of the individual's functioning, these relationships among elements are always changing and there are no fixed parameters to measure or predict "exactly" how they will function.

4) The fourth assumption was mentioned in the last statement. The individual's "reality" is formed by external and internal elements. *Internal* elements of the individual's reality are those which belong to him and are a major component of his own world. They are driving forces that shape the individual's character. On the other side, *external* elements are those which are outside of him but intimately related to him.

In other words, the entire "reality" of the individual has one *Internal Area* of elements that belong exclusively to the individual, that are located within himself and shape his unique personality; and an external area of elements that are located outside the individual but is related to him in such a way that they are an essential part of his global reality.

## c) Development

I would like to develop this last item, following my other assumptions.

**External Area** of elements of the individual's reality with which he is intimately related. Those elements could be regrouped in three broad *fields*: created *Symbols*, material T*hings* and people perceived as *Others*.

Within the *Field of Symbols*, I am including everything external to us that has and provides meaning and are not things or people. For instance language, power, social conventions, concepts, ideas, laws, fashion, etc.

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The *Field of Things* has elements that are easier to identify like the material or physical world, including objects, animals, the environment, space, etc.

Within the *Field of Others* fall not only individuals but personified institutions, groups of people and nations.

Of course, meanings, objects and people don't exist separately because they are closely intertwined.

The External Area of individuals' is made by these three Fields functioning together, with a strong interactive dynamism. They influence each other, always generating changes within each one. Changes within the fields of Symbols, Things and Others are a product of emerging new elements and of elements that disappear within each one. Every modification changes, partially or totally, the flowing relationships among them. New people are born, appear, die, run away; new Objects that didn't exist before emerge and are known while others disappear; new Symbols arise or the meanings they use to provide change, becoming more or less dominating. The influences of one field over the other are not fixed and the relations of predominance among their elements also change. The whole external area of the individual's reality change as a result of transformations within each one of its fields and of the new relations created among them and the elements comprised by them. Just as an analogy, imagine three transparent spheres (*fields*) filled with little coloured balls (*elements*) rotating, moving and changing positions, creating different color impressions and combined rainbows together. As the rainbows move and change, the order and meaning of the individual's external reality changes as well.

**Diagram 1:**
External Area of the individual:
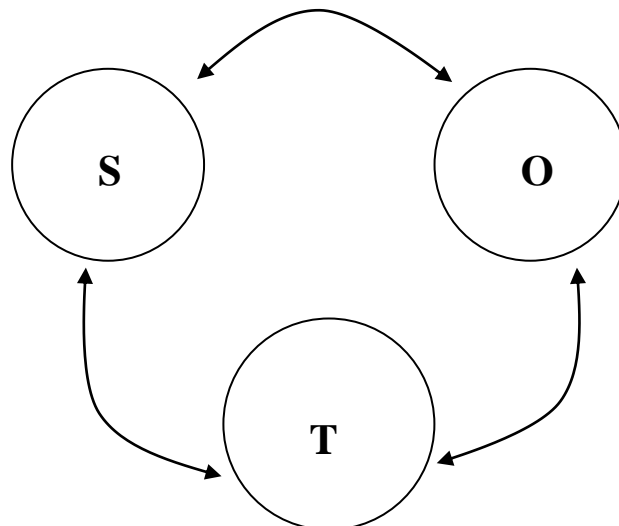
EA = External Area of the individual's reality


⟷  Relationship and reciprocal influences


FIELDS:

| S = Symbols | T = Things | O = Objects |
|---|---|---|

ELEMENTS:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| language | objects | people |
| power | animals | institutions |
| conventions | environment | groups |
| concepts | space | nations |
| ideas | etc. | etc. |
| laws | | |
| fashion | | |
| etc. | | |

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The elements of the Internal Area of individual's reality are those which constitute and form a wide area of his character, having a relevant relationship with his external reality. There are three related identifiable fields: *Convictions*, *Needs* and *Interests*.

Within the field of *Convictions* I am including two major elements: Values and Beliefs. Whether we are talking about moral values, personal or social ethics, philosophical conceptions, religion or social, political or economical beliefs, there is a kind of value-oriented system of convictions towards the interior of the individuals. Convictions always refer to general dyadic concepts – with the tendency of being generalized – such as true/false, right/wrong, justice/injustice, good/bad, equity/inequity, etc. They are linked to the concrete individual as a comprehensive vision of how reality "ought to be", including the personal reality. They can constitute a very strong and coherent system ordering all of the individual's priorities as well as they can hardly exist or not exist at all. Convictions are not *focused on* themselves (as needs are) neither to the elements of the external area of the individual's reality – even when they refer to them – (as interests are), but to an ideal model of the global reality placed elsewhere.

Within the field of *Needs*, two types of basic requirements of the individual are included: the physical and the psychological. The individual needs a certain level of well-being (food, shelter, etc.) and also security, recognition, realization and preservation of his identity, sense of belonging, etc., as an essential part of his internal reality related to his external one. Even considering that some basic needs are common to everyone, they are referred to the concrete individual and their content can not be universalized. They are basic in the sense that they are present within almost every individual, but the priorities that relate them the ways they manifest themselves are highly diverse. Human needs are a strong driving force but, as any other element, they do not work isolated. Needs are basically focused on themselves and from them they are directed to the external area of elements of the individual's reality (symbols, things and others).

The *Interests* field is comprised by the individual's preferences, wishes and aspirations in his relationship with his external reality. I am including as elements inside this field not only material interests but also spiritual, artistic and intellectual interests. They are absolutely individual and their composition is unique for each one. They do not comprise "ought to be" aspects, but wants, aims and purposes, and are directly focused on the external area of elements of the individual's reality (symbols, things and others).

Like in the External Area, the fields of the Internal Area of the individual's reality share a similar dynamic interaction between them. The three fields are closely intertwined, and they have reciprocal influences generating permanent changes within each one. Needs, Convictions and Interests appear integrated with emerging elements, with variations in the relations between them, or with elements that disappear. Every modification changes, partially or totally, the flowing relationships among them. Some convictions become stronger or weaker, change in meaning or disappear. Some new interests emerge while some others die, opportunities are discovered or forgotten, etc. Some needs dominate at a certain point or are displaced from they relevance by other elements (from any field). The influences of one field over the other are not fixed and the relations of predominance among their elements also change. The whole internal area of the individual's reality changes as a result of transformations within each one its fields and of the new relations created among them and the elements

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comprised by them. Again, just to picture it, imagine three transparent spheres (fields) filled with little coloured balls (elements) rotating, moving and changing positions, creating different colour impressions and combined rainbows altogether. Al the rainbows move and change, the order and meaning of the individual's internal reality also change.

**Diagram 2:**
Internal Area of the individual:

**IA**
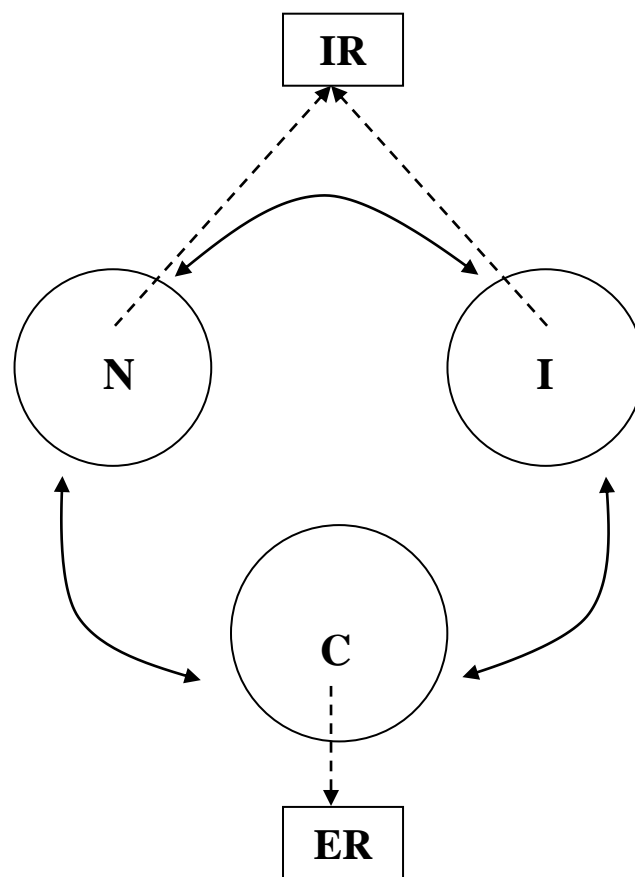
IA = Internal Area of the individual's reality

⟷   Relationship and reciprocal influences

- - - ➤   Directions towards

IR = Ideal Reality

ER = External reality

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FIELDS:

| | C = Convictions | N = Needs | O = Interests |
|---|---|---|---|

ELEMENTS:

| | Values (+) | Physic (+) | Material (+) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Beliefs | Physiological | Immaterial |
| | true/false | food | etc. |
| | right/wrong | shelter | |
| | justice/injustice | recognition | |
| | good/bad | identity | |
| | equity/inequity | security | |
| | etc. | belonging | |
| | | etc. | |

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The Internal and External Areas of the individual's reality have as dynamic interaction of relationships between them, mutually influencing each other. These relationships trigger variations within the fields (on each area) and modify the elements comprised by them.

The sum of those elements and their complex and dynamic relations and influences compound the *"global reality"* of the individual.

**Diagram 3:**
Global reality of the individual:

**GB**



IA                                         EA
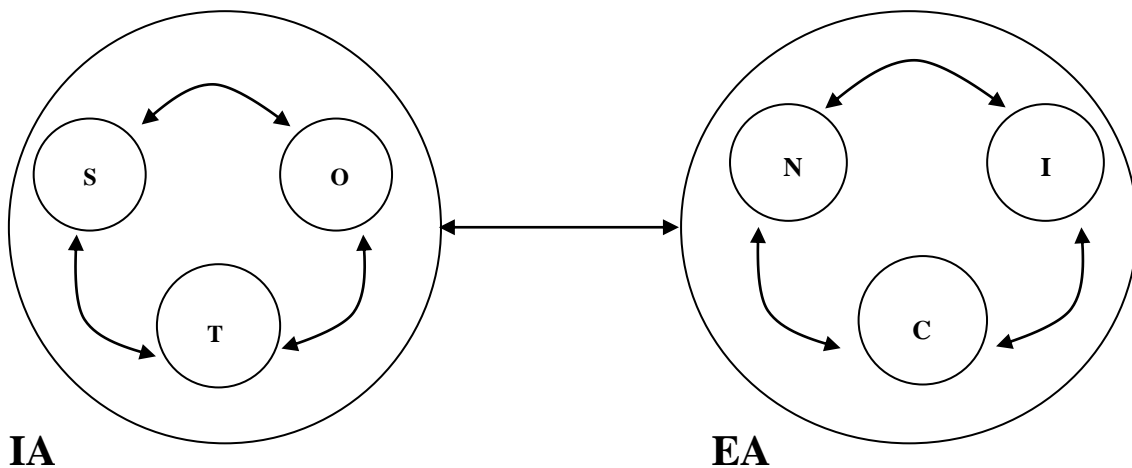
IA = Internal Area          EA = External Area

⟵⟶  Relationships and influences between IA and EA

These relations of between the Internal and the External Areas of the individuals' reality are also influenced by the *Instruments* the individuals have to handle both of them. I identify three kind of tools used by the "cognitive apparatus" of the individual to handle the relationships between his internal and external realities: *Affection*, *Imagination* and *Reason*.

Each of these fields have distinct elements, and work to perform different kind of activities. But they also work closely interrelated within a process of dynamic interaction, mutually influencing each other (see Diagram 4). *Reason* includes elements of the inductive and deductive logic and is essential in the process of acquisition and orderly generation of knowledge. It is used to understand, to explain and to put in a "rational" order the relationships between the internal and external areas of the individual's reality.

*Affection* includes elements such as emotions and feelings. Love, hate, fear, attraction, empathy, rejection, trust, rage, etc., are elements of affection that have a decisive influence on all other fields and on the relationships between the internal and external areas.

The third field of Instruments is the *Imagination*, which includes elements such as creativity, inventiveness and – stretching its meaning – intuition. It is closely related to the field of reason but its function is oriented more to generate rather than to explain and provide order. Arts, sciences, generation of new technology and functions are basically a product of imagination working together with reason. On the other hand, imagination can acquire enormous proportions and high intensity within the individual's cognitive apparatus and, working together with the field of Affection, it can generate paranoiac or maniac visions of the individual's reality (generating "irrational" order). Imagination can function as a lens influencing the relations between both areas of reality and generating very positive or negative effects.

Each one of these fields can have a dominating position shaping the main way by which the individual manages the relationships between his internal and external realities. But all of them are also influenced by the relationships among the areas they pretend to contain and manage. In this sense, the way the individual thinks, what he feels and how it impacts on

his imagination are a by-product of the relations between his cognitive apparatus and the internal and external areas of his own reality.

**Diagram 4**
Cognitive Apparatus of the individual:

## CA
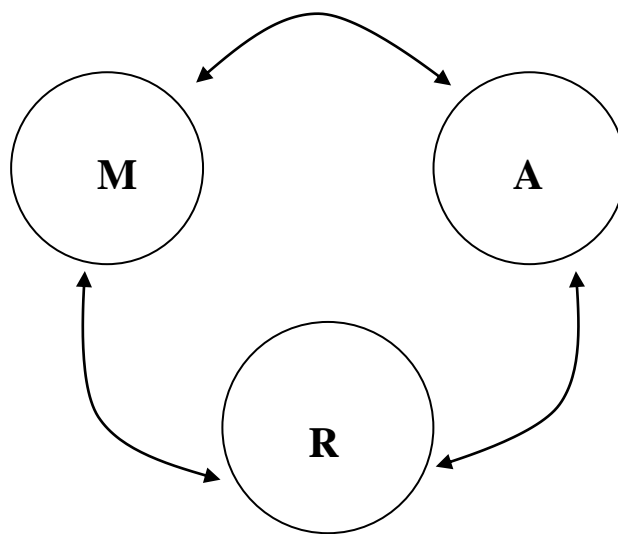


CA = Instruments of the individual's Cognitive Apparatus

FIELDS:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| R = Reason | A = Affection | M = Imagination |

ELEMENTS:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| logical | feelings | creativity |
| inductive | emotions | inventiveness |
| deductive | etc. | etc. |
| etc. |  |  |

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Finally, we have to take into account the influence of *Time* in the process of the individual functioning. Within the idea of Time I am

including not only the present and the individual's projections into the future, but also his memories and past experiences that always play a significant role in the process. Even if time  is the only element that can cast an influence on all areas without necessarily being influenced in return, past experiences and memories also change in content and meaning as the flow of relationships among the other elements changes.

Here we have the final representation of this dynamic and complex system.

**Diagram 5**
The big picture:
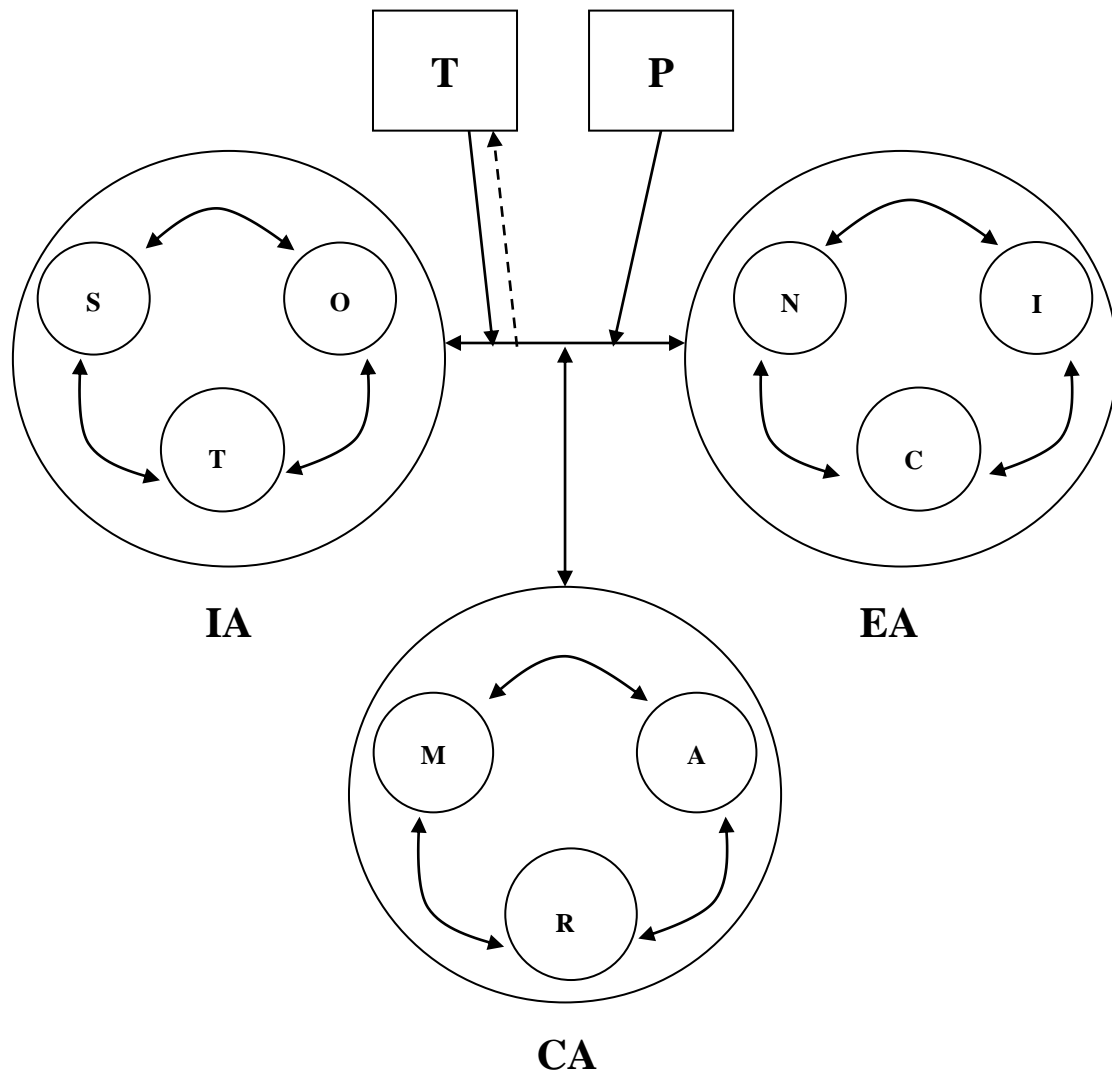


T = Time
P = Perceptions

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⟶    Relationships

## d) Conclusions

My conclusion is that Perceptions (especially in a conflictive situation) are located in the middle of the scheme and shaped by these relationships.

It is a <u>fluctuating product</u> of the tensions among these relationships.

Taking into account the dynamism and complexity of the artificial classification made, it is possible to look at each of the fields/elements and try to detect the way they are functioning at a certain time and regarding a certain situation.

Hence, it would be possible to understand the functioning of the individual's system going through the relationships created among their elements and to find some ways to work with them. Each area will have a unique way of functioning according to the predominance of relations among these elements. The *Internal Area* of the individual's reality could be driven mainly by his *Convictions*, by his *Needs* or by his *Interests*, prioritizing some elements and relegating others to secondary places. The area of the Instruments used by his cognitive apparatus will be functioning with the main dominance of the fields of *Reason*, *Imagination* and *Affection*, marking certain kind of processes as most influential on the overall flowing of relationships. The *External Area* of the individual's reality by the individual's reality will be heavily influenced by Other people, by some Symbols or by certain Things, acquiring meanings in the relationship with the functioning of the cognitive apparatus and the individual's internal area of reality. Memories, past experiences and the passing of Time will also play their respective roles. Within this interplay, *Perceptions* will be shaped and reshaped. As long as these perceptions change, the individual's behaviour regarding the perceived situation will change.

From a practitioner's point of view, each one of these fields represents opportunities to understand and influence the whole system of relationships. My hypothesis is that each one of these fields is an "entry point" to the system of relationships shaping perceptions. To have an influence on the behaviour of the individuals it is necessary to influence these relationships and reshape the perception of the conflictive situation.

Changes in perceptions can not be produced by only trying to work by rational analysis and the use of Reason, nor by inventing creative scenarios through the Imagination or by just using Affective influences, without taking into account the whole set of relationships created by their

interaction. Perceptions can not be changed just by looking for fluctuations within the external reality of the individual without considering how they are related to his internal reality and how he handles this relationship. In the same way, changes can not be made within the internal reality of the individual without taking into account how it is related with his external reality and how relationships among them are managed by his cognitive apparatus.

I am not sure whether the classification of areas, fields and elements that I presented is accurate enough and not over arbitrary and artificial. But I am persuaded it is not possible to understand and to work in conflictive situations by trying to find the *only main explanation* of the perceptions changing process and the complex behaviour of individuals in these situations. In that sense, my conclusion is that, as analysts and practitioners, *we have to look at the tensions among dynamic relationships that shape perceptions*.

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## II. THE BEAGLE CHANNEL CASE

### a) Background

Argentina and Chile share a 5.000 km long frontier along the Andes Mountains. In 1833, a general treaty was signed to establish limits according to general principles (the highest peaks, the water divide, etc.), but no actual physical divisions were made. At the extreme South, three little islands (Lennox, Picton and Nueva), separated from the Argentine Isla Grande by the Beagle Channel were disputed by the two countries. They are located over on the Atlantic Ocean, giving control over 200 miles of water to the sovereign country.

Both countries litigated over the island for years. In 1972 they submitted the case to the arbitration of the Queen of England who gave the islands to Chile in 1976. Argentina rejected the verdict.

The tensions increased as both countries were not able to settle the dispute. In December 1978, the new argentine military government (led by General Videla) decided to go to war against the military government of Chile (led by General Pinochet). Troops were mobilized to the Andes and planes were given the order to take off and to bomb military targets within Chilean territory. The planes didn't take off that day due to bad weather conditions. The same day, Johannes Paulus II, the pope, sent his personal representative to both countries to offer them to mediate over the case.

The Vatican's mediation stopped the war and both countries slowly entered in the process of negotiation[1].

In 1980, a draft of the Pope's proposal was presented to both countries. Chile was ready to negotiate on this basis, but Argentina didn't answer.

In 1982, Argentina declared war on Great Britain over the Falkland Islands and was defeated.

In 1983, the military government left office and Raúl Alfonsín, from the UCR party was democratically elected (it was the first free election in 50 years that the Peronist Party lost).

At the time, I was working with the Raúl Alfonsín's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Dante Caputo, as his private secretary when he learned about the Pope's proposal on the Beagle Channel.

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[1] See Thomas PRINCEN, "Mediation by a Transnational Organization: the case of the Vatican", *in* BERCOVITCH and RUBIN, *Mediation in International Relations*, Macmillan, London, 1994.

One month later, in January 1984, President Alfonsín decided to accept the Pope's proposal as a basis for further negotiations assisted by mediators from the Vatican. The final text was agreed in April that year in Rome. The Argentinean and Chilean Foreign Affairs Ministers signed the treaty on behalf of their governments. It gave the three islands to Chile, set a fixed limit on the Atlantic waters, established the bi-oceanic principle, asked for further economic integration between both countries and solved a minor controversy on the Strait of Magellan.

But the biggest political problem for the Argentine government was the Peronist Party. They had control of the Senate and they had announced they would not approve the Treaty. President Alfonsín decided to call for a voluntary national referendum (in Argentina it is mandatory to vote). The Peronist Party called for the non participation to the referendum and nationalist movements campaigned against it. On the other hand, the government party supported the process.

The campaign period:

I had been working in Alfonsin's presidential campaign for a year with Mr. Caputo and we became very close. I was 25 years old, he was 40. I asked the Minister his permission to work full-time for the "Yes" campaign (to the referendum). Three teams were set up: 1) one within the Party to start moving the electoral machinery; 2) another one formed by television and media experts – headed by a close friend of the Minister –; 3) the third one, composed by diplomats and advisors – headed by the Vice minister. I was a sort of informal personal representative of the Minister in all these teams, so I had open access. I worked mostly on groups 2 and 3. Our main concern was to present the treaty to the public in a way they would understand its contents. We decided to "tell them the story".

With group 3 we wrote a "blue book" and published it. The main argument was a rational one. Based upon historical data, we were showing how Argentina, during years, accepted *de facto* the Chilean's possession of the islands' territory but kept control over the sea (which was coherent with the agreement). In addition, we explained the advantages of having include the bi-oceanic principle to prevent any further Chilean territorial claims over the sea or over continental Antarctica.

With group 2 we repeated the story with a series of short TV ads, in a very simplified manner. I wrote myself some of them.

I worked very closely with a historian advisor from the Party and we travelled together and gave some conferences in different towns all over the country. We used mainly rational arguments in this travel campaign.

I was very excited about the whole process of letting the story out. I tried many times to persuade the Minister to give some speeches in order to

reinforce the people's "learning process", but he didn't pay much attention to my advice neither to my work during the campaign.

Meanwhile, group 1, after a long discussion about the axis of the political campaign, decided (actually, it was Alfonsín who decided) to establish the pursuit of peace as the main objective for the campaign. I disagreed with this idea, because from my point of view, people knew we were not going to declare war on Chile and the argument could undermine the government's credibility and hide the actual advantages of the treaty. Alfonsín didn't even read our "blue book" and started to campaign asking people to vote for Peace.

In late September, during a radio interview, the head of the Peronist Party (Senator Saadi) called Mr. Caputo "a traitor to the nation" and challenged him to debate over the Treaty on TV. Caputo immediately accepted and some basic rules were negotiated. The debate got national attention in the media. It was held in October. Even today, everyone remembers image of the old Peronist Senator shouting at the Minister and shaking all sort of papers at the same time contrasting with the bright, cool French-styled Caputo (PhD in *La Sorbonne*) talking quietly and calmly to the cameras. But today, just a few people remember the arguments sustained during the debate. Moreover, some people only remember the debate and the images, but are unable to tell what it was about.

In late October, Alfonsín headed a massive demonstration in a soccer stadium. He never met, neither mentioned, Pinochet. Instead he invited some democratic Latin American leaders to address the masses and he talked about "our Chilean brothers" under military dictatorship. One of the dominant issues was the rebirth of democracy and Latin American regional integration. But the general slogan was "Yes to Peace".

The referendum was held in November. The "Yes" campaign won, with 84% of approval, and a total electoral vote of 76%. In December, the Treaty was a approved in the Senate, by a difference of one vote, and with the opposition of almost all of the Senators from the Peronist Party.

## b) Perceptions regarding the Beagle Channel case

From the citizens' point of view
(Of course, heavily influenced by the government's view and the media)

The situation as perceived in December 1978:

1) **Time** relevant influences:

*Past:* The Chileans made territorial claims to everyone of its neighbours.
*Present:* Pinochet was getting stronger each year.
*Future:* They would soon attack Argentina.

2) **External Reality**:
*Symbols:* Sovereignty and territorial integrity were at stake.
*Things:* The islands belonged to Argentina.
*Others:* the Chilean people are naturally expansionist.

3) **Internal Reality**:
*Convictions:* We had the right to defend our territorial integrity and war is only viable if there is no other way to preserve the nation.
*Needs:* We would not be safe if they were not persuaded by force. We needed their recognition of our rights over the entire argentine territory.
Interests: It was the opportunity to show the Chileans we were stronger and to get the islands.

4) **Cognitive Apparatus**:
*Reasoning:* If we attacked them, we would be able to set the right limits.
*Imagination:* they were preparing their military forces to attack us and to take our territory from us. They wanted to take over, piece by piece, the entire south of Argentina.
*Affection:* they envied us and they had always been our enemies.


The situation as perceived in November 1984, the elections day:

1) **Time** relevant influences:
*Past:* We were able to get rid of the military government.
*Present:* We were living in an actual democracy and we were in charge.
*Future:* Chile would also become, some day, a democratic nation.

2) **External Reality**:
*Symbols:* Peace and democracy were at stake. The Pope had a very important moral authority. It was a matter of the old country against the new one.
*Things:* We got the sea. The islands maybe belonged to Argentina but Chile had privileged rights.
Others: The Chilean people were under a military dictatorship, we weren't.

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3) **Internal Reality**:
*Convictions:* Peace, democracy and human rights were more important to the nation than a piece of land.
*Needs:* we needed security if we were to reconstruct the country after the military dictatorship. Our sovereignty as a nation would be safer signing the agreement.
*Interests:* We needed to put an end to this dispute. We were interested in the Chilean harbours to have an exit for our exportations to the pacific countries.

4) **Cognitive Apparatus**:
*Reasoning:* Te Pope's proposal was reasonable and if we accepted it we would have peace. If we didn't accept it, nobody knew what the consequences were going to be.
*Imagination:* there was a chance we would be able to undermine Pinochet's regime, help democratic forces in Chile and promote economic integration.
*Affection:* After all, Chileans, and not their government, were, as the rest of Latin American peoples, our brothers.

Of course, reality is always more complex and dynamic than any kind of simplified intellectual classification.

My reading of the Beagle Channel case is that perceptions changed as a result of many fluctuations within the elements that shaped them.

The "Yes" campaign worked in its aim of producing changes within each one of the fields:

**Internal Reality:**
It changed the people's Convictions (values and beliefs), putting Peace, Democracy and Latin American integration rather than the notion of Sovereignty in the first position.
The *Need* for security was reinterpreted and identified to peace, and recognition was linked to democracy.
*Interests* shifted from a piece of land to the prospect of economic opportunities through integration and of ending the dispute.

**Cognitive Apparatus:**
We worked using *Reason* to show the people that the Pope's proposal had many advantages and represented a reasonable way to end the dispute (this was very important for some people).

Alfonsín worked mainly using the *Affective* field, linking the "Yes" vote to the support of peace, democracy and yes, his own government.

After the debate, the people's *Imagination* linked the affirmative vote to Caputo's image – the new country – and set aside the Senator's image – the old country.

## External Reality:

Actual participation of the people in the decision making process was a big change, strengthening the *Symbol* of democracy. Also the relation between the Pope's image and the symbol of peace had a great influence.

The Chilean people were presented by the campaign as separated from Pinochet, changing the image of the *Others* from enemies to Latin American brothers under a dictatorship.

The importance of the island was played down and the focus of interest was redirected towards the end of the conflict and the prospect of economic opportunities.

## c) Conclusions

I was wrong at the time. I thought that, as a government, we should work mainly through reason, giving the people the opportunity to understand the Treaty.

For me, the lesson was clear: there is not one main driving force influencing people's perceptions and behaviour. To change perceptions there is not only one way, but as many as there are "entry points" to them that shape them.

My hypotheses are the following:

1. Perceptions heavily influence behaviour.
2. If there is a change in perceptions, there can be a change in behaviours.
3. Perceptions change as a result of different changes among the elements that shape them.
4. If we can detect and understand how these elements work in shaping perceptions, we may be able to induce changes.
5. There are three essential characteristics we should never forget while working with perceptions:
   a) they constitute a result of *relationships* among *elements*. Interaction.
   b) These *relationships* are *complex*. There are no fixed patterns.
   c) Those *elements* have a *dynamic* nature. They are always changing.

*Perceptions are a result of a dynamic and complex process of interaction among changing elements.*

## III. THE DISCUSSION ABOUT PEACE PROCESSES AND PEACE STRUCTURES

### a) Introduction

In the general approach presented in Section I, I have sustained that external reality includes the field of Others and internal reality includes the field of Convictions. From this perspective, the way others behave and the convictions they have may influence our own perceptions and behaviour.

In this section, I would like to stress the importance of this relationship using the Convictions field as an "entry point". In the line of several studies on peace and conflict resolution, I think it would be good to discuss some values and beliefs we are working with and let them play their part. Regarding the link between Peace Structures and Peace Processes, I think my confusion of both categories takes ground in my understanding of the process as the "core" of any type of structure.

My argument is that in order to generate peace we need to go through the process of changing perceptions in a certain way.

From my point of view, this process should be based on three values: *tolerance of differences*, *cooperation* and c*ollaborative decision making*.

To address this issue I would prefer to analyse two personal experiences. I apologize to the reader in advance, since these experiences are very personal. But they are intended to explain how these values were incorporated into my reflections on peace and to picture the type of influences they could exert.

### b) Two short personal stories

1. The "World History" story:

When I was fifteen, and I was in high school back in my town, a History professor selected some of us for "special lectures on world history". A small group was set up and we attended these lectures at night, at the teacher's house. They were very well presented, with slides, music and texts. Slowly, session by session, he was showing us, in a very effective way, how the whole history of the world, including wars and major shifts of the human history, were a product of a great conspiracy of the international Mason and Zionist movements. I remember being shocked by the discovery, and thinking a lot about it. Finally, I asked my father one

night about the explanation of the world history given to us – he was re-reading Kant at that moment – and he told me with a slight indifference, in these approximate words: "Any explanation of a complex phenomenon that takes only one factor into account is a stupid over-simplification of reality". A few years later, my very best friend at the time who attended those lectures with me, entered in a military school and joined the nationalist movement while I joined a social-democrat party ( the Radical Civil Union, or UCR, for its name in Spanish) led by Raúl Alfonsín. Some years later, while I was working with the new democratic government's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dante Caputo, my old friend led his military unit into the uprising of the nationalist military forces against the democratic government (they were defeated, and he went to jail and later left the army).

Due to this short personal story, I am a little reluctant to look for "the main explanation" of complex phenomena. I dislike universal theories, as well as fixed intellectual structures to explain dynamic and changing situations.

2. "The collective puzzle" story

This experience was very different from the previous one. I wanted to learn English in my country, and I joined a four day, "total immersion" special course. We were a group of six students – we didn't know each other – and three teachers in a quiet hotel in the countryside, and we could not, by any circumstances, speak Spanish. We had formal classes and we played different games in English. One of these games was a survival puzzle set in a dangerous island. The main goal was to find adequate trees to build a boat and find the way out of the island, to another island, were we knew a ship was going to stop in 40 days. If we were not able to reach the coast within 40 days (40 movements), we would die. We were supposed to go step by step, avoiding swamps, crocodile zones and aggressive natives, looking for rivers to drink water of and fruits to eat. We were allowed to travel for two days without water and three without food. Each piece of the puzzle was one day of travelling. We were also supposed to guess what we were going to find in the next piece, based upon what we were able to see of the island as we moved along. We had to decide what to do at every step. In addition, each one of us had secret instructions and individual goals – most of them clashed with other people's goals – (like to look for a river first, to build weapons first, to try to maintain the group united, to try to split up the group in two, to lead the group, etc.). We played the game for almost six hours. We were building and re-building a decision-making process as we discussed what to do next. From my own

perspective, during the first two hours, I had a continuous dispute with one of the members of the group about what decisions to take and how to take them. At a certain point he stopped arguing with me and I had the feeling I was leading the group. I was able to analyze the situation, its pros and cons, to put options on the table and to make proposals. We discussed them and decided. If consensus was not reached, we would continue the discussion for some time and then, if there was yet no agreement, we would vote. At a certain point, I was sure that we were only one step away from the end. We had to choose between continuing without water or come back to the river we had already found and loose the limited and precious time we had. I was trying to push the group to take the risk, while others insisted on going back to the river. We argued for a long time. I was tired. Finally, I dropped the discussion and accepted the majority's will when we voted. We went back to the river and after a few moments, without my active participation, and with a personal feeling of disillusion, we were able to reach the way out and all of us survived.

When the game finished, we learned several things. The teachers told us we were, as a group, an exception, because most of the time the players were not able to survive, mainly because of the fights within the group and of the secret competing goals. For example, the man with whom I had argued at the beginning had the secret goal of being the leader of the group. Because he was tired of arguing with me, he decided to let me lead as long as he agreed with the final decision. Many of the other secret directives were also competing individual goals, but all of us had the same main goal: to survive. As we had agreed at the very beginning about it, we were able to deal with our individual secret goals and to establish a collective decision-making process as a group, which was open enough to introduce options and let us search for the best ways of fulfilling everyone's requirements and suggestions.

For me, it was a great lesson. I discovered the advantages that collective decision-making has over individual leadership. If the group had followed my proposal and taken the risk of continuing without water, we would all have died.

## c) Values and beliefs

I think values and beliefs individuals have is one of the driving forces that shape perceptions and human behaviour. Trying to be scientific, accurate, objective and/or universal, we often make an effort to set aside our values and beliefs and we are unable to find a way to explain reality. Why do we do that?

Our values and beliefs work within the perceptive scheme not only to influence our behaviour but also to shape other people's perceptions of their own external reality as long as they have contact with us.

Following this idea, I have only one last point to make. I think it doesn't matter what type of social structure, of the political system and the constitutional order a nation has, as long as they all *embrace*, *protect* and *enhance* **tolerance of differences, cooperation and collective decision making**.

One could argue that this conception of the institutional social structure is – in some way – a product of a western approach to the world, but that would not really matter, because I an not saying that other values or beliefs are wrong or worse: I am just thinking and trying to work here and today.

Some of the implications of these beliefs are:

1. Each person, group, society and State, should be entitled the right to seek its own goals and tensions resulting in a difference of objectives at any level should be solved by a collective decision making process. Democracy is a good political system for this kind of collective process, but the most important element, from my point of view, is the process, not the system and the rituals attached to it. On this regard, education towards peace is crucial. It should include tolerance of differences among people and cultures, understanding of diversity, training in analyzing complex situations and cooperation with others, among other features.

2. Peace theories looking for *"the fundamental answer"* to avoid conflict could lead to authoritarian conceptions of human behaviour and systems of containment and oppression. There is no such answer. There are only tentative approaches to peace and conflict, and cycles of evolution in thinking and acting. There are power struggles and competing values everywhere, and I think it is as good as inevitable. From my perspective, a social system is good if there is enough room to express these competing goals and if limits are set by collective creation (laws, habits, religion, public opinion, etc.) rather than by a laboratory theory or any other external element.

3. The so called paradoxical logic of conflict that states that "if you seek peace you have to be prepared for war" is fallacious. We should replace the word "war" with "understanding of differences and cooperation", and this way the paradox would disappear. Only the dynamics of cooperation can counteract the dynamics of conflict.

4. I very much like the idea of "Peace as a dynamic state of reality in which its essential properties arise from how we do things and not from the things we do". This means that we don't need definitions of peace as bad as we need guidance about the kind of processes we should be engaged in the pursuing of peace. Tolerance of differences, cooperation, and collective action are key concepts of the needed shift on understanding conflict and peace. Once again, understanding how cooperation works and training in collective action are needed at all levels in the education process.

5. The collective decision making process for seeking peace should be open and flexible, and it should include all parties engaged in a conflictive situation to be truly cooperative and tolerant.

6. We should seek to replace the static concept of security for the dynamic concept of peace, from the UN Security/Peace Council downwards, including national peace, international peace and human peace.

7. Peace institutions at all levels (private, NGO's, national and international organizations) should be promoted. We need *more action* in a tolerant, cooperative and collective fashion rather than *thinking*, if we seek to influence other people's perceptions.


## d) Conclusion

Going back to the beginning of this section, I am convinced that as long as we stick to these three process-like values (tolerance of differences, cooperation and collective decision making) it will be possible to occupy any type of structure with the kind of processes that could change people's perceptions and behaviour.

The result of this process of change in perceptions and behaviours will be a continuous process of building and re-building peace structures.


*Francisco Diez*