

Is PCT really about violence?

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Subject: Is PCT really about violence?

[From Bill Powers (930928.1605 MDT)] Hal Pepinski (930928)

> I have been trying to describe the mindset I find myself adopting as I work within PCT. I find myself there in the same mindset as I have otherwise modeled as "violence."

Then I suggest that you treat this as evidence that you don't yet understand PCT. More important, you don't yet understand what kind of theory PCT is. PCT isn't a proposal about how people behave: it's a proposal about how they WORK, no matter what behavior they happen to be producing. Whether the behavior is the kind of which you approve or the kind you'd like to see changed, the model remains exactly the same. People who get along together nonviolently and noncoercively are just as good examples of control systems as people who indulge regularly in force and violence.

One difficulty that many newcomers have is with the word "control." People have told me that I ought to stop using that term and call the theory something else. But I feel that there is a good reason for people disliking the term control, and that in coming to understand why they dislike it they will learn something important about control and about human nature.

Control is a basic natural process that has been very poorly understood. Most of the problems people have with control arise from this lack of understanding. Consider, for example, "self-control." Self-control, as commonly understood, means keeping yourself from doing something you want to do, or forcing yourself to do something you don't want to do. But in PCT, this is evidence of conflict: the problem is that you want to do two (or more) things that are incompatible with each other, so you have to force yourself to behave according to one goal while you actively suppress or overcome another control system inside yourself that is trying to achieve a different goal. When self-control is needed, this is evidence of a failure of the organization of control systems. Unconflicted control doesn't feel like forcing yourself to do anything or to overcome anything: it just feels like doing things, effortlessly. Most of the effort you feel in doing ordinary things comes from you fighting yourself. The Zen masters knew this long ago, although they didn't understand how it comes about.

People don't like to be told to control themselves because they know that there's something wrong when they have to do that. If they really understood how control works, however, they'd realize that what they object to is being put into conflict with themselves. It isn't control itself that they dislike; they dislike the consequences of setting up their own control systems in a self-defeating way.

In relationships between people, control gets a bad name in another way. People who don't understand that EVERYONE controls regularly make the mistake of trying to control other people. The people to whom this is done don't like it, for reasons which PCT can explain in detail, and retaliate by trying to control right back, which the original controllers don't like, either. This is the etiology of all human conflicts like the ones we see in their logical extension in places like the former Yugoslavia. Violence is the natural result when living control systems try to control each other.

PCT teaches us how control works in a living organism, and so teaches us what to expect when living organisms interact in a controlling way. With an understanding of PCT, it's no longer necessary to play out the game of control and countercontrol mindlessly, as most people do. When you understand that pushing on another control system naturally produces a counterpush, you can predict immediately that pushing will simply create, quite naturally and automatically, a effort counter to your own effort. Your own effort is producing the countereffort that thwarts it. If producing that countereffort isn't what you want, then you'll naturally look for some other way that will work better. Of course you may have some reason for wanting to elicit active opposition. PCT doesn't forbid you to do so. It simply tells you what to expect.

It's certainly not necessary for people to try to control each other. Given our culture and history, it's not easy to work out noncontrolling ways of living together, but it's possible. It's particularly hard to do when interacting with others who will try to control you at the drop of a hat, and apparently enjoy it without considering the consequences. But it's possible, with practice, to figure out how to opt out of that game and seek other ways. I think that some people have understood this situation and have tried for millennia to find other ways -- but without the understanding of human nature that would help them pin down exactly what's wrong and therefore what to do about it.

> [As I consider another model] I find I get more of the consequences I seek, as against confirming fear and distrust of others as I live within the violent control model.

As I said, control theory applies to all behavior. When you speak of "getting more of the consequences you seek," you're describing a control situation. You compare the consequences you're getting with the consequences you want, and use the difference as the basis for adjusting how you act. That's straight undiluted PCT. Fear and distrust of others is created through uninformed interactions with other control systems that are also uninformed by PCT. Mutual fear and distrust certainly do exist. But they exist because people don't understand how they and others work, and therefore keep doing things, like trying to control others, that only increase the fear and distrust.

I would like to hear how your "other model" is constructed. I am quite confident that it will turn out to be closer to the actual implications of PCT than the concept you're rejecting under the false impression that it is PCT. Violence represents a failure in an organization of control systems; it represents the actions that a control system will produce when it's managed to allow itself to be forced to extremes where control is on the edge of total failure. You have somehow come to characterize control behavior in terms of situations where control is about to break down, a situation that no foresighted control system would ever allow to occur. And you're thinking of the way control systems interact when they're ignorant of their own nature, and treat all other living systems the same way they treat any object. You can't deny that people often do behave in this way -- but control theory does not cause that. Ignorance of control theory causes it.

Best, Bill P.