

PCT in a Nutshell

The most obvious phenomenon of life is this:

We act to make our wants come true.
(And stay true until we change the want).

This phenomenon can be seen in ourselves and all around us all the time—ranging from very short to very long time frames: milliseconds to years.

- You want to bend a finger: You bend it.
You trip while walking: You recover.
- You want to draw a circle: You pick up a pencil, sharpen it, place a paper on your desk—and draw a circle.
- You want a college degree: You apply, take classes and tests, sustain yourself and persevere—and get your degree.
- You want to develop a product: You —, —, —, and the product is ready.

This phenomenon deserves an explanation.

You continually *compare* the mental image or specification of what you want, your purpose, which we call a *reference perception*, with the corresponding mental image of what is, which we call *present perception*. From this comparison emerges a *difference signal* (corresponding to dissatisfaction) which causes *action*—your means to *influence* your world and your *present perception* of it. Effective action causes this present perception to conform to the reference perception. Action ceases when your present perception agrees with your reference perception.

The net result of this circular loop of interacting functioning elements and signals is purposeful behavior. A self-directing “living control system” controls its present perception so that it agrees with the internally specified reference perception. The living control system shapes its world the way it wants to perceive it and keeps it that way. When *disturbances* (external influences, stimuli) affect something the living control system has a reference perception for, it will act to restore its perception (resist the disturbance, respond).

Conventional scientific attempts to explain behavior have not recognized or clearly understood the obvious phenomenon of control discussed above, and are misleading. Behavior is neither just caused by stimuli in the environment nor is it blind execution of internal plans. Behavior is not an end result. It is an integral part of the closed loop process which controls perception. As can be seen from this summary, the explanation for the phenomenon of self-direction or control includes an explanation for the appearance of stimulus-response, but without the notion that the organism is conditioned or reinforced; that the behavior is shaped or that it is motivated by reward or punishment. It also includes an explanation for the appearance of plan-execution, but without suggesting blind computation.

PCT provides the first explanation for this pervasive phenomenon of control that can stand up to scientific scrutiny. When you understand the details of this technical explanation, you understand how autonomous control is synonymous with freedom and how it gives rise to conflict or cooperation—depending on what is wanted, how it is perceived, by whom and to what degree.

With an understanding of PCT, many apparent mysteries of human behavior can be seen for what they are: manifestations of control, given a wide variety of reference perceptions, present perceptions, circumstances and external influences in a world where autonomous living control systems interact. The mysteries simply vanish, and the terminology that went with them becomes irrelevant.

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