

Ten Minutes — An Introduction to PCT

In November 1991, Bill Powers graciously accepted my invitation to fly from Durango to Los Angeles to attend my first one-day program introducing what we now call Perceptual Control Theory, PCT. He also graciously abstained from too much detailed critique of my performance. The next morning, before I took him back to the airport, Bill sat down to compose what he thought might be a more effective introductory summary of what PCT is all about. Here is what he wrote. The original is reproduced on the following page.

Dag Forssell

10 minutes

- 1. There have been two paradigms in the behavioral sciences since 1600 AD. One was the idea that events impinging on organisms make them behave as they do. The other, which was invented in the 1930s, is control theory. We are going to explore the second of these paradigms.*
- 2. Control theory explains how organisms ~~can~~ control what happens to them. This means all organisms from the amoeba to ~~mankind~~ Humankind. It explains why one organism can't control another without physical violence. It explains why people deprived of any major part of their ability to control soon become dysfunctional, lose interest in life, pine away, and die. It explains why it is so hard for groups of people to work together even on something they all agree is important. It explains what a goal is, how goals relate to behavior, how behavior affects perceptions, how perceptions define the reality in which we live and move and have our being. Control theory is the first ~~scien~~ scientific theory that can handle all these phenomena within a single testable concept of how living systems work.*

Bill Powers

10 minutes

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2. Control theory explains how organisms ~~can~~ control what happens to them. This means all organisms from the amoeba to ~~man~~ human being. It explains why one organism can't control another without physical violence. It explains why people deprived of and major part of their ability to control soon become dysfunctional, lose interest in life, pine away, and die. It explains why it is so hard for groups of people to work together even on something they all agree is important. It explains what a goal is, how goals relate to behavior, how behavior affects perceptions, how perceptions define the reality in which we live and move and have our being. Control theory is the first ~~new~~ scientific theory that can handle all these phenomena without a single testable concept of how living systems work.

NOV 3, 1991.

Bill Powers