Policing PCT purity and correctness

Unedited posts from archives of CSG-L (see INTROCSG.NET):

Date: Fri Mar 11, 1994 7:01 am PST
Subject: Re: PCT Police Action

<[Bill Leach 940311.08:08)]   >[Rick Marken (940310.0930)]

Dear Mr. Police Officer;

I didn't do it, and if I did, I didn't mean and won't do it again :-)

I suspect that a lot of my postings are "so much noise" to others on the net
(though I really do hope that I am not upsetting people too much).

Read my lips: I ACCEPT "CONTROL OF INPUT"! :-)

I have done a bit of design work occasionally over the last 30+ years and some
has been with control systems in the classic mechanical sense, so again -- I
BELIEVE IN CONTROL OF INPUT.

<as an aside> BTW, I have noticed that often when one encounters a person that
has trouble with that idea, it is useful to use the specific term "drive" in
an explanation. That is, many people that seem to have trouble with the
control theory concept that a controlling system is controlling input will
almost magically understand if you just say: "A control system controls its
input by driving its output." and then go on from there.

I want to accept and internalize that humans are control systems. The concept
is so elegant, so ...... CLEAN! I don't, for a moment, doubt that my years of
experience as and with humans has "filled my brain" with "truths" that just
aren't! I am not bothered by this, I have had to go through such things before
though probably nothing even close to being as "ingrained" as this sort of
"knowledge and understanding".

I am trying to understand how control theory works to explain human behavior
at the purpose level. That is, I am absolutely comfortable with PCT concepts
of the control systems explanation for the physical operation of limbs, voice,
etc. I don't however, think that I have the "Ah Ha, this is obviously true!"
feeling for how PCT explains "higher level" behavior -- yet.

A part of my search for understanding is to deal with "other discoveries" that
seem to be true (TO ME). I believe that when one learns to employ the
teachings of such as Dale Carnegie a person will almost always experience
stunning "success" in their life and be a "fundamentally happy" person. I KNOW
that I do not have proof in the scientific sense that such is true but I do
have rather compelling evidence from experience that indicates that it is
true.

In trying to relate what little I understand about the implications of PCT for
human behavior, I personally have to come to terms with such beliefs.

I recognize that in the first place, my conclusions about such behavioral
modification techniques could just plain be wrong. It may well be that
Carnegie (and others) have not discovered any generalized principles about
human interaction. Though I really have a VERY long way to go before I will
believe that.

It could be that even if such discoveries are true that they are irrelevant to
PCT. I have even more trouble with that thought. In my concept of what PCT is,
at some point in the future, given enough information PCT should be able to
explain the success or failure of any human interaction process.

At my present stage of understanding I am not so concerned with whether the
theories or ideas of these others are "good PCT" but rather whether PCT
explains their successes and failures. As I see it, at least in a general way,
it should.

Now then, that is one point. Another, equally important is that when I am "assaulted by the PCT thought police" and "beat over the head" about some "minor nit", I do recognize that such (possibly) seemingly minor detail can be vital to understanding.

For example you can explain the operation of a controlling control loop by starting at ANY point in the loop and going full circle. Such a method may even be work for complex control systems but "understanding" can not be achieved unless one recognizes that the whole process does have a "starting point" and that the starting point is always purpose (which at least for an existing design, is usually assumed rather than explicitly addressed). [I have to chuckle a little at that last parenthetical comment as the thought occurred to me that as far as control system design efforts are concerned, there just aren't many designs that fit the description of "already existing" as profoundly as we the people!] Obviously if you start with purpose then there is only one view that is correct and that is that everything that happens in a functioning control system is a result of trying to match input to reference.

I don't doubt any of that but I know I am not used to thinking in terms of it applying to "even" my own behavior. The implications are staggering.

-bill leach

Date: Fri Mar 11, 1994 11:57 am PST
Subject: Re: PCT Police Action

[From Rick Marken (940311.1030)]   Bill Leach (940311.08:08 EST)

>   Read my lips: I ACCEPT "CONTROL OF INPUT"! :-)

Not to worry. I'm not a "belief" policeman; I'm an "understanding" policeman. I don't much care whether people "accept" PCT or not. So you won't get a ticket from me for rejecting PCT. But, nor will you be able to get out of a ticket by simply saying that you "accept PCT". I'm not interested in getting "converts"; I'm interested in getting people who understand 1) what PCT is about (control) 2) how it applies to behavior and 3) how it works (control of input).

I call myself a "policeman" , by the way, because I think I am perceived as being one by many people on the net -- as Dan said, I seem to be trying to maintain "PCT purity". But I just think of it as trying to be accurate about the three points I mentioned above. Sometimes my interest in accuracy may seem like a personal attack -- but it's not (though I admit that I may have a communication style problem -- I like my style, though, so I guess we're all stuck with it). My "PCT Police Action" was satirizing the perception that I think people have of me as the Ayatolla of the net; I was not really policing your "beliefs"; I was policing statements that you made about PCT that (I thought) were wrong. I would rather be thought of as the strict, inflexible math teacher who will only accept the EXACT right answers; still an annoying person but, at least, not a belief policeman.

Again, I am just not interested in whether people "believe" in PCT or not. What I care about is that they know how the model works, how it applies to behavior and (given those two) HOW TO TEST IT. The only reason anyone should believe in PCT (or anything else, for that matter) is because they have TESTED IT -- and tested it PROPERLY. People who have not tested PCT are not of interest to me; if they believe in it, that is no more important to me than that they believe in christianity or whatever; if they don't believe in it then BIG DEAL; they probably don't like it because they don't like the word "control" or something like that.

It is very difficult to correct a misunderstanding without implying that the person who produced it is "dumb". That's the spot that I'm in; if I say that some statement is wrong, the person who made the statement is likely to feel bad and angry at me. I don't know how to avoid this problem.

All I can say is that I LOVE EVERYONE WHO PARTICIPATES ON THIS NET even though
I think that some of you say things that are demonstrably wrong about PCT. I
care about getting the PCT ideas right; I am not interested in "putting people
down" or "proving how smart I am". But I do have strong feelings about getting
the PCT message across honestly and ACCURATELY. I know that I seem like a
policeman but please try to remember that, whenever I "attack" something that
seems incorrect about PCT, I am attacking the idea -- NOT the person who
proposed it.

And, by the way, when people come back and tell me (often quite rightly) that
I am wrong, I assume it's because what I said was wrong (or because it was
thought to be wrong), not because I am "dumb" (at least, I IMAGINE that that's
why people are doing it).

Best,   Rick

Date: Fri Mar 11, 1994 8:23 pm PST
Subject: Re: PCT Police Action

<[Bill Leach 940311.18:03 EST(EDT)]   >[Rick Marken (940311.1030)]

Rick; let make sure that the are NO errors in perception here on this matter.
I said "PCT Policeman" (or however I phrased it) because I thought it was
"cute". You originally proposed the idea (I think) and I got quite a chuckle
out of it.

"Yes, indeedy, no bout a doubt it!" You are a purist, sometimes a vague purist
but a purist just the same.

All that might bother me but you are also persistent, so if someone continues,
you will keep trying to present your point in different ways and eventually
either because of something you say or a comment from someone else will "clear
things up."

While I'll admit that I have "cringed" a couple of times when reading your
postings, usually to someone else (fortunately for me), I don't take your
methodology as demeaning. Besides I actually enjoy your approach most of the
time (even when I have been the 'target').

As I tried to say before... If there is any one thing that attracts me to PCT,
it is precisely the refreshing devotion to correspondence with reality that is
present in PCT research.

And this (roughly):

    "What a novel concept, these nuts actually believe that if the model and
    reality don't match that it is the model that need work!" <dripping with
    sarcasm>

-bill leach