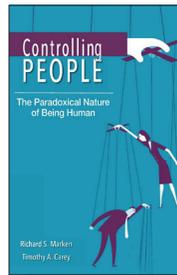


Controlling PEOPLE

The Paradoxical Nature of Being Human

Review by Frederick W. Nickols
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If you're interested in knowing more about Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) then this book is for you. If you're not interested in PCT you should be. Why? Because PCT is a wonderful theory that helps you understand the how and why of the ways in which people control various aspects of the world in which they live, including dogs, cats, kids, coffee cups, other people, their wives, their husbands, themselves, cars, their boss, diets, exercise, the size of their paycheck and just about anything imaginable that someone, somewhere, at some time wants to be a certain way. It is about control; it is about people controlling and it is about controlling people.

Rick Marken and Tim Carey do a marvelous job of laying out the essence of control as it manifests itself in relation to human behavior. Chief among the surprises awaiting you (if you're new to PCT) is that we don't control any of those things mentioned above; instead, we control our perceptions of those things. Thus the mantra of PCT: Behavior is the control of perception.

In 10 reasonably short, easy-to-read, easily understood and well-written chapters, the authors lay it all out, beginning with the ambiguous pair of words in the title—"Controlling People"—and making their way through control, Perceptual Control Theory, including a hierarchy of control and the way it works to repair itself known as "reorganization" on to matters related to people trying to control other people (which necessarily touches on conflict and a way of resolving it known as "The Method of Levels") and ending up with a nice summary of what it's all about.

A few of the points I value most about the book are listed below:

- The clear, simple, straightforward explanation of control and Perceptual Control Theory (PCT).
- The notion of human beings as a "multitude" of control systems, not just a single system.
- The explanation of reorganization (and I'll leave that to you to read).
- The nature of conflict and "going up a level" as a means of resolving it.
- The critique of "carrot-and-stick" practices in light of control.
- The discussion of "freedom" in light of humans as controlling beings.

I've been a fan of PCT for many years now and a fan of its late creator, William T. Powers. I think Bill would have been delighted with this book because I think he would think as I do; namely, that "Controlling People" will do much to bring PCT into the mainstream of meaningful views of human behavior and lead more people to see other people and themselves for what they are: "Living Control Systems."

Buy it. Read it. Learn from it. Enjoy it.