

# CLIENT-CENTERED THERAPY / CARL ROGERS

Born into a close-knit Midwestern Protestant family, Rogers was raised on a farm. He spent two years at Union Theological Seminary before moving to Teachers College at Columbia University, from which he received his doctorate in 1931. Here Rogers was influenced by and sometimes torn between the teachings of the Freudians and the contemporary, more scientifically-oriented psychology of E. L. Thorndike and his followers. In his first post, in the child study department of a Rochester social agency, Rogers began developing his own form of therapy, which emerged out of the therapeutic relationship rather than being imposed from without. He was further influenced by Otto Rank's philosophy that "the individual client is a moving cause, containing constructive forces within, which constitute a will to health."

In 1937 Rogers moved to Ohio State University, where he solidified the core of his new therapy, and subsequently to the University of Chicago. He published his *Client-Centered Therapy* in 1951, and its widespread effect subsequently made him one of the chief spokesmen in the field of humanistic psychology. In 1969 he was one of the founders of the innovative Center for Studies of the Person, in La Jolla, California, where he is presently in residence.

According to Rogers, man is an organic creature, an individual who is always capable of growth, but who may on occasion need to be reminded how to go about releasing his potential.

It was this total acceptance of the individual which provided the orientation for

Rogers' subsequent therapeutic developments. The person who wanted advice was no longer to be categorized as a patient, but looked upon as a client. This eliminated the whole medical model, because since the person was no longer seen as "sick," there was no need to delve into his past experiences in order to determine the cause of his illness. The focus of client-centered therapy is on the present situation. Additionally, the person, not the "problem," was the focus of attention, and feelings were more important than the intellect.

### "Conditions of Worth"

Client-centered therapy focuses on an individual's inherent tendency toward self-actualization; that is, the essential forces within a person working toward the development of all capacities which lead to self-maintenance and self-enhancement. It is postulated that this process is thwarted in early life when "conditions of worth" (exterior, usually parental standards of right and wrong) are placed on experiences. A person begins to value his own experiences by the criteria of these externally imposed conditions instead of by his own organismic response. This creates an incongruency between a person's self-image and his experiencing self. Thus, experiences not in line with the self-image are distorted or completely shut off from conscious awareness. The work of therapy centers on healing this division.

There are three significant characteristics which a client-centered therapist considers of utmost importance in his relationship with the client: genuineness, empathic



understanding, and unconditional positive regard. Of these characteristics, genuineness, or congruence, is the most basic. Genuineness signifies that the therapist is in touch with his own feelings, and can be fully present in the relationship with the client and express himself freely with no attempts at role playing. Genuineness readily leads to an openness to the client's feelings, and hence empathic understanding. Essential to empathic understanding, in turn, is nonpossessive caring and acceptance — i.e. unconditional positive regard.

According to Rogers' principles, these qualities in the therapist will be perceived and positively responded to, and the client will begin to change in the direction of greater awareness and gradual acceptance and trust in his own inner processes. The therapist does not attempt to advise or direct the client in this growth process. He trusts the client's ability to provide his own direction; that is,

he trusts in the constantly evolving self-actualization process. Therefore, he avoids the use of such techniques as Gestalt, bioenergetics or psychodrama because such behavior places the therapist in the false role of "expert."

Because client-centered therapy relies so heavily on the human qualities of the individuals involved and the genuineness of the relationship, it can be easily applied in a wide variety of situations where the aims are to increase interpersonal understanding and enhance personal growth.

Rogers and his team of psychiatrists have defined several stages which people go through in client-centered therapy. By the last stage, the client should no longer be fearful of experiencing feelings of any immediacy or richness of detail. In psychotherapeutic terms, the client can be regarded as having restored his composure — the ability to take life as it comes.

