

Book Review:
***The Handbook of Person-Centered
Psychotherapy and Counselling***
**Edited by Mick Cooper, Maureen O'Hara, Peter
F. Schmid, and Gill Wyatt**

Title: *The Handbook of Person-Centered Psychotherapy and Counselling*
Editors: Mick Cooper, Maureen O'Hara, Peter F. Schmid, and Gill
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By training and inclination, I am a systems-oriented practitioner. So, when a co-editor of *The Person-Centered Journal* asked if I was interested in reviewing *The Handbook of Person-Centered Psychotherapy and Counselling*, I questioned whether I was really the appropriate person for the task. Sure, I have been having increasing appreciation for Rogers' original work and for the development of the person-centered approach (PCA). And sure, I had been noticing how PCA and systems theory are highly similar in ways I had not noticed previously (Cornelius-White & Kriz, 2008). For instance, implicit and explicit in PCA is the notion of humans as self-regulating, "self-righting" systems that tend to either increase in complexity (authenticity and congruence) or stagnate and deteriorate (incongruence), as was presented in Arthur C. Bohart's chapter on "The Actualized Person." However, since most of my concentrated exposure to PCA had come in the 1980s during my doctoral work, I still wasn't sure that I was the guy for this particular task. I am glad, however, that the editor was both understanding and persistent with me. What I have been treated to for my efforts in reviewing *The Handbook* has been nothing less than sublime pleasure.

Lest the reader think that this volume is simply "yet another" review and presentation on Rogers, his approach, and developments

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within the PCA over time, it is not – it is much, much more. Each author in this volume is a Rogers scholar in his or her own right and as such presents his or her own unique perspective on various aspects of person-centered theory and application. Each presents both his or her scholarly review of Rogers' concepts and theory development since then, often accompanied by relevant research and common criticisms. Reading this volume is much like hearing a piece performed by a concert master (with Rogers leading out with the first chapter), then having a wealth of premier musicians comment on, explicate, and revel in the master's work, each bringing his or her own unique perspectives, histories, understandings, contributions and talents to bear.

The structure of the book is both wide-ranging and complete, beginning with an original chapter by Carl Rogers himself on the basic conditions of the facilitative therapeutic relationships. From this launching point, the major sections of the book include various treatises on the theoretical, historical, and philosophical roots of PCA with chapters by Peter Sanders, Godfrey T. Barrett-Lennard, Peter F. Schmid (who offers an exceptional grounding in the philosophical roots of PCA), Arthur C. Bohart, Mick Cooper, and Maureen O'Hara; on therapeutic practice in general with sections by Gill Wyatt, Margaret S. Warner, Jeffrey Cornelius-White, Jerold Bozarth, Elizabeth S. Freire, Shake G. Toukmanian and Lila Z. Hakim, and Martin van Kalmthout, in addition to several of the previously mentioned authors; and on application of PCA in a variety of settings and formats, with sections by Dion Van Werde and Garry Prouty, Colin Lago, Charles J. O'Leary and Martha B. Johns, Jobst Finke and Ludwig Teusch, Lorna Carrack, and Valerie Land Henderson, Gary Leah Barfield, and Natalie Rogers; as well as professional issues related to PCA, with offerings by Robert Elliott, Richard Worsley, Suzanne Keys and Gillian Proctor, Elke Lambers, Keith Tudor, and Roelf J. Takens. Within each major section, Rogers scholars present explication of the core concepts of PCA in a cogent, thoughtful manner. In many edited volumes, it is not uncommon to see notable "unevenness" across chapters. This volume, however, does not suffer from this malady. While many "voices" are heard, they seem to blend well, creating an illuminating chorus for the reader.

As a systems-oriented academic, practitioner, and family psychologist, the singly most engaging chapter was that of Charles J. O'Leary and Martha B. Johns on couples and families. Not only do they clearly connect PCA-oriented couples-and-family work to current perspectives (e.g., Emotion-Focused Couples Therapy as practiced by Sue Johnson and supported by the research of John Gottman) but to historic systemic traditions as well (i.e., Virginia Satir and Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy). O'Leary and Johns use a helpful vehicle early in the chapter, the "... internal and external job description for a person-centered couple and family therapist," to convey many of the central aspects of PCA-oriented work with couples and families. For me, however, it also went to the heart of my contention about this volume as a whole – that it really underscores the common basis and heritage we all share, regardless of the technical labels. For example, among their "job descriptors" is the practice at the beginning of therapy to welcome each participant into therapy, asking them to share their reasons for being there, utilizing "... multi-directional partiality" in their interactions. This concept is virtually identical to the "neutrality" and "benign curiosity" emphasized by some seminar-family-systems thinkers (Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, & Prata, 1983). Beyond this particular chapter, other examples of this phenomenon arise as well. For instance, Mick Cooper's chapter on developmental and personality theories highlight the recursive nature of development (as particularly apparent in his Figure 7.1) and through the inclusion of more recent relationally emphasizing developments within PCA. Further in this regard, Cooper presents Barrett-Lennard's (2005) nine systems of relation within human existence, which is strikingly similar to George Engle's (1977) systemic conception of the biopsycosocial model of clinical practice, which is inherently systemic in its nature (Sadler & Hulgus, 1992). Peter Schmid and Maureen O'Hara's chapter on group therapy and encounter groups also provides similar illumination. Their contention that PCA-oriented group work is not an individually oriented approach applied to groups but a group approach sometimes applied to individuals is similar to many systemically oriented therapists' beliefs that you are always working with a family, regardless of how many people are in the room. In fact, their levels of group process presented also fit very nicely for family therapy as well. Extending even

further, Jeffrey Cornelius-White in his chapter on congruence notes Seeman's (2001) notion of organismic integration, which, in systemic terms, looks like a multi-level, recursively organized homeostatic mechanism of human engagement. Thus, these are just some of the examples embedded in this volume that highlight the communality across perspectives.

Part of what this volume highlights, in my view, is the common PCA-based core to most modern psychotherapeutic approaches, even though this was not a stated goal for the book. It helps emphasize, without being overpowering, that the core conditions are central to most effective and ethical practice. Thus, even for a systems-oriented academic and practitioner like myself, this volume is both a reminder and a refreshing plunge into a familiar pool.

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