

COMMENTS ON FRED ZIMRING

Jules Seeman

I have been asked to comment on Fred's paper. As a preface, I want to make a general observation. I see the paper as an example of continuing efforts to understand psychotherapy in new ways. This genre of inquiry is vital in keeping alive and fresh our understanding of psychotherapy in general and the Person-Centered Approach in particular. On these general grounds I value the paper in addition to the specific contribution that it can make.

As to the content of the paper, I see it as a venture into a revised theory statement about the dynamics of client-centered therapy. Because it is a new statement, Fred has chosen to focus largely on the formulation itself and its rationale, emphasizing the concepts and the vocabulary of this theory statement without an extended effort to connect it with other vocabularies of psychotherapy. I believe that this approach is a useful one. An author needs the space to put forth these ideas clearly and in their own terms so that we can see and absorb these ideas without having them immediately diluted by rejoinders. We now have the concepts and the language of Fred's thinking.

At this point I can both leave Fred's ideas intact for now and also muse about the next steps that any concept must confront if it is to have durability. In this connection, I see several steps that may be taken. For me, one of the first steps is to connect with the history of an idea. Client-centered theory had a clear birth in 1940, so we now have over a half century of evolution and history to provide a structure for understanding client-centered theory. A new idea, then, must necessarily be contextual if it is not to hang out in a limbo of its own. On that score Fred's idea must find a place in the conceptual ecology of client-centered theory if it is to be maximally informative. Fred has already begun that task, but there is more that each of us can do if we wish to enjoy the task of wrestling with a new idea. I have been called upon here to comment, but I want my contribution to consist of the ideas that I have put forth above. What I do not wish to do is to delve into specifics here, primarily in order to provide breathing space for Fred's idea as it begins here. But questions will be asked, as they should, and they will be necessary in order to broaden the perspective of a new idea: What is this idea's origin? Where does it overlap with concepts now in use? How can we begin to assess its uniqueness in enriching our understanding of client-centered therapy? What modifications come to mind? These conjectures only begin to illustrate the many ways in which dialog can begin. Shall we start?

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