

BOOK AND ARTICLE REVIEWS

Book Reviews

Invitation to Person-Centred Psychology.

Merry, T. (1994).

London: Whurr Publishers.

Merry offers another recent book from Great Britain on the person-centered approach. We have Mearns and Thorne's valuable book in 1986, Thorne's 1991 and 1992 books on, respectively, the therapeutic and spiritual dimensions of the person-centered approach, and Carl Rogers (haven't read them), and now Merry's book from 1994. I don't know of a single book on the approach published in the states in the past ten years that is not a reprint or collection of Rogers. (Levant and Schlien's edited volume was published in 1984). At least two of the four British imports are guides for the novice and the uninitiated. What does this signify? Maybe that the debate in the states over what to call our organization will be resolved in favor of "The Association for the Development of the Person-Centred Approach."

Merry's invitation to person-centered psychology will entice readers interested in both personal growth and development and the person-centered approach. Early chapters on theory and philosophy form the foundation for examinations of identity, motivation, values, free will, love, relationships, therapy, and the person-centered approach at work in classrooms, families, groups, multicultures, and nations. Case studies and excerpts from Rogers's therapy work illustrate main points of theory and practice.

The theory chapters place Rogers in the context of humanistic psychology and introduce his core ideas: actualizing tendency, self-actualization, conditions of growth, fully functioning person, and organismic valuing process. Expositions here as throughout are brief, straightforward, and informative.

Chapter titles after the first are interrogatives, anticipating questions of searching and critical readers: What Makes Us Tick? How Did I Become Who I Am? If People Are So Constructive, Why Do They Do Such Destructive Things? How Do Person Centred Therapists Help? Can I Love Somebody, and Still Be Myself? Can Understanding Lead to Peace?

As an invitation to the person-centered approach, Merry's book is rightly not an exhaustive discussion of person-centered theory, nor a personal essay on the merits of those ideas. It offers enough critical discussion to stimulate alert readers and preserve itself from potted textbook presentations, and enough opinions to interest us in the author.

On its own terms, the book mainly succeeds. Merry gives a basic introduction to Rogers's theory and its application in a wide variety of venues, and, in the process, takes on some interesting issues, e.g., does person-centered therapy work for people in non-western cultures?

(For those making a purchasing decision, Mearns and Thorne's book, in contrast, is a manual for the practice of individual therapy.) As one text for a undergraduate counseling course or a first course in the person-centered approach, it will serve well. The book does have some faults though.

Merry notes that his book is based on Rogers's work, and indeed it is, almost entirely. But he promises to tell about the person-centered approach, not just Rogers's ideas. The approach has grown beyond Rogers's work to form a family of related and often conflicting theories and practices. Gendlin's and Rice's extensions of Rogers, Brodley's important work on nondirectiveness, and the various hybrid therapies that graft dream analysis or Gestalt therapy or strategic family therapy or body work onto Rogerian roots are all part of the gang. And missing in Merry's account of Rogers is a sense of the development of Rogers's thinking and mention of what Van Belle calls his turn to mystical universalism.

Comparisons of Rogers to Freud and Skinner are a minor fault. But why not compare person-centered psychology to cognitive psychology, or self psychology, or some other therapy actually in business today?

In the later chapters, Merry sometimes blurs the boundaries of person-centered approach, confusing it with a liberal political position of some sort. He quotes at length a teacher in a poor London school who claims that all teachers have a responsibility "to educate children for life in a multi-cultural society." Are we to understand that this obligation necessarily follows from Rogers's ideas, or is even consistent with them? I would argue that Rogers's theory does not have any implications for the content of curricula, and indeed is inconsistent with having any ends for students beyond those they choose.

Merry writes, "Person centred psychology argues in favor of introducing more democratic, cooperative values in schools, and regarding academic attainment and the development of social responsibility and self-knowledge as equally important" (p. 102). Not quite, I think. Person-centered psychology of course has nothing to say about the value of academic achievement. It doesn't argue in favor of introducing any particular values in schools, if by introduce we mean make part of a curriculum. It doesn't say that schools should actively promote self-knowledge and social responsibility. What it does do, or rather what Rogers does, is state a theory of human nature, which includes an account of conditions for personal growth, and directly address people and ask them if they are willing to provide these conditions. In Merry's chapters on school and society, Rogers's tentative statements become almost a program for social change of a left-liberal, multicultural sort – a Rogers for the '90s.

The problem with Merry's rendering of the person-centered approach is a failure to articulate and defend core moral principles of the approach. Without the guidance of a clear statement of principles and their justification, it's easy to make the approach embrace just about any "humanistic" or "progressive" program. And, if one thinks it does embrace anti-racism education, cooperative education, preparation for life in a multicultural society, etc., clear moral arguments will let the reader judge the merits of the position.

There are places where I wish Merry had gone into more depth. For example, in the discussion of the question "Why Do People Do Such Destructive Things?" Merry addresses a familiar problem with Rogers's theory: If we are basically good (creative, social, constructive, tending toward growth) how come so many of us do bad things? Merry gives Rogers's reasons for an optimistic view of human nature, but doesn't probe them or examine their relationship to theory. Rogers's answer is that we do bad things because of social conditioning and free choice. The social conditioning argument doesn't meet Rollo May's criticism that Merry raises: How does

destructive socialization happen if we are all essentially good? The free will argument is based on a misunderstanding of Rogers's theory of personality that Rogers himself shared.

Briefly, if all human action is motivated only by the actualization drive, there is no free will. There is only the actualization drive manifesting itself in actions that enhance or harm the organism. A person is a manifestation of the actualizing tendency, not an agent, a source of actions, who can will, choose, and act on the basis of reasons. Merry's talk of "the specific ways each of us attempts to actualize" (p. 18) has the cart before the horse. We don't attempt to actualize. The actualization drive attempts us.

Reviewed by:
Barry Grant

Beyond Carl Rogers.

David Brazier (Ed.) (1993).
London: Constable.
ISBN 0-09-472610-8.

I am informed that this book, edited by David Brazier, was originally intended to be the gathering together of some of the conference papers presented at the Second International Conference held in Stirling, Scotland in 1993. It is worth noting that the book does not represent this conference and indeed includes material which was not presented in Stirling.

This apart, the book commences with a well-written introduction from the Editor which serves to stimulate interest and whet the appetite for the rest of the book, comprising of fourteen papers by individual authors.

The book is divided into three sections – part one consists of four papers which revisit the core conditions and explores some of the notions and ideas inherent to them. Whilst disagreeing with some of the content on a theoretical level of the first two papers in particular, the section as a whole makes interesting and thought provoking reading and certainly has the potential to enable the reader to gain greater clarity about their own theoretical perspective on the core conditions. The most controversial paper in this section is the one contributed by David Brazier himself, "The Necessary Condition is Love." In this, he attempts to take a crucial aspect of theory (i.e., that what is effective in client-centred therapy is the unconditional acceptance the client receives from the therapist – which he then equates with love) and turn it on its head in a somewhat convoluted yet clever way, to suggest that what really works is not the experience the client has of unconditional positive regard but that the giving of this by the therapist serves as a model of how to be for the client.

"The therapist meets this need (for positive regard in himself) by being a therapist and the client learns to meet this need by being directly influenced by the therapist's example" (p. 76).

As far as I can see there is nothing new in what Brazier seems to be suggesting in that his ideas amount to a view that what works in Client-Centred Therapy is in fact behaviour modification modeled on the therapist's behaviour.

The second and longest section of the book (seven chapters) is devoted to "Creativity in Practice" and has chapters which look at "Person-Centred Expressive Therapy," "Multi-Media

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