

## Introduction

Some months ago a strange thing happened to me. I think it was the nearest I have ever come to having a psychic experience. I was intent on some work I was doing at my desk, when suddenly there flashed into my mind a complete sentence: "I walk softly through life." I was puzzled by the intrusion, but since it had nothing to do with the work at hand I shrugged it off. A bit later the peculiar nature of this "flash" struck me, and I began to speculate about it.

All sorts of associations crowded in. As a boy I'd read hundreds of books about frontiersmen and Indians, men who could glide noiselessly through the forest without stepping on a dead twig or disturbing the foliage. No one knew their whereabouts until they had reached their destination and accomplished their purpose, whether they were on an errand of mercy or a warlike mission. I realized my professional life had had that same quality. I haven't wanted to make a fuss about where I am going until I have arrived. I have avoided noisy confrontations whenever possible. When I was told, early in my career, that it was absolutely impossible for a psychologist to carry on psychotherapy, because this was the province of the psychiatrist, I made no attempt to meet the issue head-on. Instead, I first used the term treatment interviews to describe what we were doing. Later the label counseling seemed more acceptable. Only after years of experience, and the amassing of a considerable body of research by me and my colleagues, did I openly speak of the fact - by then obvious - that we were doing psychotherapy. I had walked softly through life, making relatively little noise until I had arrived at my destination - and it was too late to stop me. I do have a stubborn streak.

One disadvantage of this way of proceeding is that I have not always realized the full significance of the pathway that I, and an increasing number of others, have taken. It is only in recent years that I have come to recognize how "radical" and "revolutionary" our work has been. I use those terms in their original, not their popular, meanings. Our work has "gone to the root of" many of the concepts and values of our culture and has brought about "a complete or marked change" in many principles and procedures. Most notably it has altered the thinking about power and control in relationships between persons. That is what this book is about.

So you will find in these pages many men and women who are walking softly through life - and creating a revolution as they do so. The book tells of homes and schools and industries and interfaces between races and cultures, all of which have been drastically changed by persons who trust their own power, do not feel a need to have "power over," and who are willing to foster and facilitate the latent strength in the other person. It tells of specific instances - a family relationship, a workshop, a day camp, a group of Catholics and Protestants from Belfast - where ordinary ways of proceeding have been turned upside down by a basic trust in the constructive potential of the person.

As Gertrude Stein said of Paris, "It is not what Paris gives you; it is what she does not take away." This can be paraphrased to become a definition of the person-centered approach, the value-laden concept central to this book. "It is not that this approach gives power to the person; it never takes it away." That such a seemingly innocent base can be so truly revolutionary in its implications may seem surprising. It is, however, the central theme of what I have written.

I have endeavored to give examples - both anecdotal and research - to illustrate the force of the person-centered approach. Such a way changes the very nature of psychotherapy, of marriage, of education, of administration, even of politics.

These changes indicate that a quiet revolution is already under way. They point to a future of a very different nature, built around a new type of self-empowered person who is emerging.

Excerpt from *Carl Rogers on Personal Power*. Rogers, C.R. New York: Delacorte Press. 1977, 6-8.

### **The Politics of the Helping Professions**

In 1940 I began to try to change what I would now call the politics of therapy. Describing an emerging trend, I said, "This newer approach differs from the older one in that it has a genuinely different goal. It aims directly toward the greater independence and integration of the individual rather than hoping that such results will accrue if the counselor assists in solving the problem. The individual and not the problem is the focus. The aim is not to solve one particular problem but to assist the individual to grow, so that he can cope with the present problem and with later problems in a better integrated fashion. If he can gain enough integration to handle one problem in more independent, more responsible, less confused, better organized ways, then he will also handle new problems in that manner.

If this seems a little vague, it may be made more specific. ... it relies much more heavily on the individual drive toward growth, health, and adjustment. Therapy is not a matter of doing something to the individual, or of inducing him to do something about himself. It is instead a matter of freeing him for normal growth and development, of removing obstacles so that he can again move forward."

When they were enunciated first in 1940, great furor was aroused by these statements. I had described various counseling techniques much in use at that time—such as suggestions, advice, persuasion, and interpretation—and had pointed out that these rested on two basic assumptions: that "the counselor knows best," and that he can find techniques by which to move his client most efficiently to the counselor-chosen goal.

I see now that I had dealt a double-edged political blow. I had said that most counselors saw themselves as competent to control the lives of their clients. And I had advanced the view that it was preferable simply to free the client to become an independent, self-directing person. I was making it clear that if they agreed with me, it would mean the complete disruption and reversal of their personal control in their counseling relationships.

Over the years, the point of view I advanced so tentatively in 1940 became enlarged, deepened, and reinforced, both by clinical experience and research. It became known as client-centered psychotherapy, and in the intervening years it has been buttressed by more empirical studies than any other therapeutic approach.

From the perspective of politics, power, and control, person-centered therapy is based on a premise which at first seemed risky and uncertain: a view of man as at core a trustworthy organism. This base has over the years been strengthened by experience with troubled individuals, psychotic persons, small intensive groups, students in classes, and staff groups. It has become more and more firmly established as a basic stance, though each person must learn it step by step for himself, to be convinced of its soundness. I have recently described it as "the gradually formed and tested hypothesis that the individual has within himself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his self-concept, his attitudes, and his self-directed behavior - and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided."

Is there any basis for this premise other than wishful thinking and the experience of a few people? I believe so. Biologists, neurophysiologists, and other scientists, including psychologists, have evidence that adds up to one conclusion. There is in every organism, at whatever level, an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfillment of its inherent possibilities. There is a natural tendency toward complete development in man. The term that has most often been used for this is the actualizing tendency, and it is present in all living

organisms. It is the foundation on which the person-centered approach is built.

The actualizing tendency can of course be thwarted, but it cannot be destroyed without destroying the organism. I remember that in my boyhood the potato bin in which we stored our winter supply of potatoes was in the basement, several feet below a small basement window. The conditions were unfavorable, but the potatoes would begin to sprout-pale white sprouts, so unlike the healthy green shoots they sent up when planted in the soil in the spring. But these sad, spindly sprouts would grow two or three feet in length as they reached toward the distant light of the window. They were, in their bizarre, futile growth, a sort of desperate expression of the directional tendency I have been describing. They would never become a plant, never mature, never fulfill their real potentiality. But under the most adverse circumstances they were striving to become. Life would not give up, even if it could not flourish. In dealing with clients whose lives have been terribly warped, in working with men and women on the back wards of state hospitals, I often think of those potato sprouts. So unfavorable have been the conditions in which these people have developed that their lives often seem abnormal, twisted, scarcely human. Yet the directional tendency in them is to be trusted. The clue to understanding their behavior is that they are striving, in the only ways available to them, to move toward growth, toward becoming. To us the results may seem bizarre and futile, but they are life's desperate attempt to become itself. It is this potent tendency which is the underlying basis of client-centered therapy and all that has grown out of it.

It is obvious that even this premise of client-centered therapy, without going further, has enormous political implications. Our educational system, our industrial and military organizations, and many other aspects of our culture take the view that the nature of the individual is such that he cannot be trusted - that he must be guided, instructed, rewarded, punished, and controlled by those who are wiser or higher in status. To be sure, we give lip service to a democratic philosophy in which all power is vested in the people, but this philosophy is "honored more in the breach than in the observance." Hence simply describing the fundamental premise of client-centered therapy is to make a challenging political statement.

Excerpt from *Carl Rogers on Personal*. Rogers, C.R. New York: Delacorte Press, 1977.

## Chapter 13

### In a nutshell

Every social revolution is preceded by, or brings with it, a change in the perception of the world or a change in the perception of the possible or both. Just as inevitably, these altered perceptions are first seen as ridiculous nonsense or worse by the collective common sense of the time.

The Copernican revolution is no doubt the prime example. To think that the earth was not the center of the universe, that it orbited the sun and was part of a vast galaxy, was not only absurd, it was a heresy undermining religion and civilization. There are also lesser examples. The thought that invisible organisms, whom no one could see, were the cause of illness, was the most patent nonsense. The belief that slaves were not chattels to be bought and sold like cattle but were persons with full personal rights was not only a mischievous thought that was contrary to history and the Bible, it was economically upsetting and dangerous. The notion that an obscure mathematical formula showed that a most minute form of matter, the atom, could, if split, release incalculable power was clearly just a bizarre offshoot of science fiction.

Yet every one of these "ridiculous" perceptual changes altered the face and the nature of our world. It is the "common sense" that gradually came to be seen as ridiculous.

Let me mention a familiar instance of the way this change comes about. It was a fact perfectly obvious to everyone-and furthermore supported by Holy Writ - that the earth was flat, and those who suggested it was spherical were dangerous heretics. But when Columbus sailed to the New World, without falling off the edge of the earth, this actual experience, this evidence that the previously accepted view was in error, forced a change in the way the earth was perceived. And this change was a change not only in geography. It made for a reevaluation of this new-fangled field termed science. The place of man in the larger scheme of things was brought into question. It even called into question the Bible as an encyclopedia of factual knowledge. It opened the human mind to possibilities hitherto unknown. It led to visions of continents to be discovered and countries to be explored. It altered the whole perceptual framework of life, and men and women were frightened and excited and changed by the prospect. The impossible became possible.

All this was brought about not by the theories concerning the globe. These had been around for a long time. The change was forced by *evidence* that the theories had validity.

In somewhat similar fashion, I believe, it is the *evidence* of the *effectiveness* of a person-centered approach that may turn a very small and quiet revolution into a far more significant change in the way humankind perceives the possible. I am much too close to the situation to know whether this will be a minor or major event, but I believe it represents a radical change. Like every stream that flows around the roots of the culture, threatening to undermine its cherished views and its long established ways, it constitutes a frightening force, a force that is, as usual, met with all the weight of the common sense of the culture.

What I want to do is to contrast various elements of that common sense with the evidence which contradicts it. I do this in very condensed form, since the evidence has

already been covered in this book.

It is hopelessly idealistic to think that the human organism is basically trustworthy.

*-But-*

The research and the actions based on this hypothesis tend to confirm the view - even strongly confirm it.

It is absurd to think that we can know the elements that make human psychological development possible.

*-But-*

Such elements have been defined, identified as attitudinal conditions, measured, and shown to be effective.

It is nonsensical to think that therapy can be democratized.

*-But-*

When the therapy relationship is equalitarian, when each takes responsibility for himself in the relationship, independent (and mutual) growth is much more rapid.

It is unreasonable to think that a troubled person can make progress without the guidance and direction of a wise psychotherapist.

*-But-*

There is ample evidence that in a relationship marked by the facilitative conditions, the troubled person can engage in self-exploration, and become self-directing in profoundly wise ways.

It is dangerous to think that psychotic individuals can be treated as persons.

*-But-*

The evidence shows that this is the most rapid road to the psychotic's utilizing the breakdown itself as material to be assimilated into personal growth.

It is fuzzy-minded and weak not to take control over persons.

*-But-*

It is found that when power is left with persons, and when we are real with them, understanding of them, caring toward them, constructive behavior changes occur, and they exhibit more strength and power and responsibility.

A family or marriage without a recognized strong authority is doomed to failure.

*-But-*

Where control is shared, where the facilitative conditions are present, it has been demonstrated that vital, sound, enriching relationships occur.

We must assume responsibility for young people, since they are not capable of self-government. It is stupid to think otherwise.

*-But-*

In a facilitative climate, responsible behavior develops and flowers, in young and old alike.

Teachers must be in control of their students.

*-But-*

It has been established that where teachers share their power, and trust their students, self-directed learning takes place at a greater rate than in teacher-controlled classrooms.

Teachers must be firm, discipline strict, evaluation tough, if learning is to take place.

*-But-*

It has been proven that the teacher who empathically understands the meaning of school to the student, who respects the student as a person, who is genuine in relationships, fosters a learning climate definitely superior in its effects to the "commonsense" teacher.

Teachers must teach what students ought to know.

*-But-*

Significant learning is greater when students choose, from a wide variety of options and resources, what they need and want to know.

It is obvious that in any organization there has to be one boss. Any other idea is preposterous.

*-But-*

It has been substantiated that leaders who trust organization members, who share and diffuse power, and who maintain open personal communication have better morale, have more productive organizations, and facilitate the development of new leaders.

Oppressed groups must revolt. Violent revolution is the only way for the oppressed to gain power and improve their lives.

*-But-*

History bears out the view that even if successful, this simply leads to a new tyranny replacing the old. A nonviolent revolution, based on a person-centered approach that empowers the oppressed, appears to have far more promise.

Deep religious feuds, cultural and racial bitteresses are hopeless. It is a fantasy to think they can be reconciled.

*-But-*

The fact is that small-scale examples exist in abundance to show that improved communication, reduction in hostility, steps toward resolving the tensions are entirely possible and rest upon tried intensive group approaches.

A conference or a workshop has to be organized and run by one or more leaders who are in charge. Any other view is unrealistic and quixotic.

*-But-*

It has been demonstrated that a large and complex enterprise can be person-centered from start to finish - in its planning, in its operation, in its results - and that such a concentration of persons sensing their own power can move creatively into new and unexplored areas - a result that could not have been achieved by commonsense methods.

It is obvious that in a strictly controlled situation, with absolute power at the top, the powerless ones can exert no significant influence.

*-But-*

In an almost perfect laboratory situation, the powerless members of a day camp, who had come to respect their own strength because treated in a person-centered way, showed themselves to be extremely powerful.

In the sixties there was a trend toward basic social change, but that has now died out. Only a dreamer would fail to recognize this.

*-But-*

More and more people with a person-centered approach to life are infiltrating our schools, our political life, our organizations, as well as setting up alternate life-styles. They are living new values and constitute a continuing and growing ferment of social change.

People don't change.

*-But-*

A new type of person, with values very different from those of our present culture, is emerging in increasing numbers, and living and being in ways that break with the past.

Our culture is becoming more and more chaotic. We must turn back.

*-But-*

A quiet revolution is under way in almost every field. It holds promise of moving us forward to a more human, more person-centered world.