Chalk and Cheese:

A review of two introductory books on person-centred counselling

Person-Centred Counselling in a Nutshell **by Roger Casemore** pp.120 Sage 2006 £9.99

The Person-Centred Counselling Primer **by Pete Sanders** pp.128 PCCS Books 2006 £10.50

These two books are both marketed as introductory books on the same subject: person-centred counselling. They are both short and readable and both are volumes in new series. There the similarities end for these are two books of markedly different qualities – in content, style, authorship, authority and form. In a sense the titles say it all. Casemore's is a bad book in a flawed series. By definition, both series and book attempt to reduce, in this instance, the complexities of life, human distress, and helping people, into 'a nutshell'. As such, it is a classic example of reductionism, which stands as a close cousin to other current obsessions such as short-termism, 'evidence-based practice' (based on a specific view of 'evidence'), and quick solutions to determined outcomes in therapy as well as life – obsessions of which most person-centred practitioners are critical. The 'Primer', on the other hand, as its title suggests, is a first, a foundation, from which to build upwards and outwards.

Person-centred therapists may well be surprised that Roger Casemore is the author of this volume in the series as he is not generally associated with this approach to therapy and, certainly in other writings, does not appear to subscribe to the fundamental principles of person-centred therapy. That said, the structure of the book is reasonable, taking the reader through an overview of the person-centred approach; through beginning the counselling relationship; the beliefs of the approach; the challenge of what Casemore refers to as 'the three central conditions'; the process of personality change; and concluding with a chapter on therapy as relationship. However, once we get to the content, the book is deeply flawed. In the first chapter and in a matter of pages, Casemore misrepresents person-centred theory:

- He says that Rogers refers to all six necessary and sufficient conditions of therapy as the 'core conditions' – which he didn't.

- He perpetuates the error that the so-called 'core conditions' are central and that the others are 'further conditions' – and then refers to the first condition as central!

- He is unclear about the distinction between the term 'self-actualisation' (from Goldstein and Maslow) and Rogers' concept of the actualising tendency, and then gives self-actualising as an example of the actualising tendency – which is, to say the least, confusing.

- He conflates and equates the organism with the self – two concepts which Rogers clearly distinguishes in his writing.

Other misrepresentations and inaccuracies include: (in Chapter 3) the direction of Rogers' thinking regarding the formative and actualising tendencies, and Casemore's assertion that person-centred counsellors need to hold the beliefs he says they need to – which they don't; and (in Chapter 5) the descriptive purpose rather than the prescriptive use of Rogers' process conception of therapy, in addition to which Casemore doesn't mention the more significant aspect of this theory, that of the process scales which Rogers and others developed and which formed the basis of key research in the field of therapy.

Casemore illustrates his text throughout with composite clients from his own casework. However, some of the practice he reports is, from a person-centred perspective, questionable. In his description of what he says in the initial meeting Casemore says so much that he appears more therapist-centred than client-centred. Later in the chapter he refers to phenomenological observation and then illustrates this with a passage in which he reports saying to his client (p.15):

'What I am saying is that here, in this room, it is OK for you to choose to be with these uncomfortable feelings…I won't think any worse of you if you do. In fact I'll be really pleased if you can share those feelings with me. I'd feel privileged by that…'

This is so far from phenomenological observation and method that it would be laughable if this book were not purporting to be a serious introduction to and exposition of person-centred counselling. It is perhaps surprising – and worrying – that this book got through the usual editorial, advisory and publishing processes. The lack of checks allows poor writing. For instance (on p.3), Casemore writes: 'I believe that you are the only expert in your own internal world' – which of course implies that there could be other experts in there too! I assume that Casemore means that the client is the only expert *on* her internal world. Also, in the text he cites at least one book incorrectly, and misspells one author's name in the (short) list of References. Casemore may talk the person-centred talk – and there are many instances when he gets the talk wrong – but from his casework illustrations he certainly doesn't walk the walk.

Finally, the book is physically difficult to read. At 17.3cms x 11cms it is hard to read without breaking the spine; it has tight side margins which include chapter titles, and irritating front and back cover flaps which, presumably are designed to act as books marks. In all, it's a dreadful book. Don't buy it!

By contrast, Sanders' book is everything Casemore's isn't: well-written, accurate, intelligent, mature, fresh, authoritative, comprehensive and critical. Moreover, while still small and slim – at 19.8cms x 12.9cms the PCCS Primer books are a little bigger than the Sage books – it's easy to read, and pleasing on the eye and to the hand.

It is hard to present any therapeutic approach briefly and accurately, and perhaps particularly hard to introduce person-centred therapy as it is both so widely known and so commonly misrepresented. Sanders does an excellent job. The Primer comprises fourteen short chapters beginning with the origins of person-centred counselling, followed by chapters on personality and the actualising tendency, which is presented in the context of and in contrast to other theories of motivation, and prior to Rogers' therapeutic conditions which, properly, have a chapter each. The chapters following these cover the important principle of being non directive, and the process of change, in which Sanders presents and discusses the process scales, thereby acknowledging Rogers' view of process, in contrast to Casemore's representation of this as simply a stage theory. The final three chapters are devoted to: a transcript of an actual session with a brief commentary on it; a brief discussion of the applications of person-centred counselling in different settings (which is very short, a bit of a list, and the only weak chapter in the book); and, by contrast, an excellent discussion, co-authored with Mick Cooper, of person-centred research. And there's more: the book concludes with a list of resources for learning, a glossary, seven pages of references, and a useful index.

Sanders has an easy, engaging and dialogic writing style. He talks with the reader. He is also a critical theorist. One of the hallmarks of this book is the way in which Sanders invites the reader to think about themselves, the practice of counselling, and the world. He does this in a number of ways. Firstly, he is good on context, often introducing ideas, for instance, about Rogers' conditions, with some useful and interesting background in terms of the debates at the time Rogers was developing his ideas, and offering some appreciation of why Rogers said what he said. Sanders also acknowledges context in terms of contemporary concerns about community, socialisation, and the social world, from which he argues for a social model of health and psychopathology. Sanders is also particularly critical of the medical model (as is apparent from his article in this issue). Secondly he is informative. As a writers Sanders is succinct. He manages to provide a lot of accurate information about the theory and practice of person-centred counselling, including references to developments in theory. He refers, for example, to psychological contact and Pre-Therapy (Chapter 4), and empathy (Chapter 8). He also discusses different perspectives about non directivity (Chapter 10), and the 'tribes' of person-centred and experiential therapy, some of which will be the subject of future Primers from PCCS Books. One criticism I

have is that in his summary of these tribes, Sanders does not include Pre-Therapy or the expressive therapy of Natalie Rogers. Sanders has an easy way of developing ideas and unfolding arguments throughout the book and makes useful and sometimes new connections between different elements of person-centred theory. Thirdly, Sanders is reflective. He clearly holds the reader in mind as he writes, as if asking himself how what he's writing may be read. He also comments reflectively on the theory, for instance, telling us (in Chapter 7) that he prefers 'prizing', a word Rogers also used, to the term 'unconditional positive regard'.

As a reader I am not easily pleased. As a person-centred practitioner I am passionate about the integrity of the approach. Sanders' book satisfies me on both counts. It is excellent and well worth the price (which is discounted on internet sales and multiple copies). As will be apparent to the reader, these two books are like chalk and cheese and it will be apparent which I'd rather digest, read again and recommend.

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To Lead an Honorable Life: Invitations to think about Client Centred Therapy and the Person Centred Approach **Ed Pete Sanders** (pp 234 Pub) PCCS Books £17

The influence of Carl Rogers on contemporary psychotherapy and counselling is not always directly acknowledged even though it is considerable. Anyone who adopts a Humanistic perspective almost inevitably has a touch of person-centred influence on his or her work. However, although I knew that Rogers had been extremely influential on both sides of the Atlantic, I'd never thought of him having a 'school' in the way Freud did in the early twentieth century. Perhaps this is because the influence of Rogers on my own training and work has always been either practical or theoretically implied, but never actually made explicit.

So it was a delight, therefore, to come across *To Lead an Honorable Life;* a collection of the work of John M. Shlien who was one of the prominent members of the Rogerian school. The title comes from one of Shlien's statements:

'…however appealing and benevolent happiness may be, I do not consider it to be a worthy ultimate objective of therapy or life. In stead I believe that the most important objective in modern civilisation is : *how to lead an honorable life.*

And, if this volume is typical of the man himself, he most certainly has.

To Lead an Honorable Life begins with no less than four forewords, each by a notable Person Centred therapist who has been influenced by John Shlien. These forewords, by Godfrey Barrat-Lennard, Ronald F. Levant, Dave Mearns and Alberto Zucconi, testify to the inspirational effect Shlien had on his colleagues and followers.

In the editor's introduction that follows, Pete Sanders gives an account of his involvement with Shlien and his reasons for wanting to edit the book. Again, he paints a portrait of an inspirational figure who was, at the same time, self-deprecating enough to consider the chapters which are included in the book 'flawed work in progress'.

This sense of getting to know 'Shlien the man' is further developed by the prologue – Shlien's description of his experience of watching a poppy open – which is followed by a 'Self-Pen Portrait' which gives a succinct, but revealing account of his life and the development of his career. After this, the book splits into four sections, each of which is preceded by an editorial introduction.

The first section, called 'Psychological Health' begins with an interesting paper, written in the early sixties, called 'To Feel Alive'. In this paper, Shlien develops Rogers' idea of self-actualisation, or actualising tendency, as a primary motivation. He suggests that 'to feel alive' is a primary motivation for all living organisms:

'The basic motive of behavior is to enable the behaver to *feel alive*. This is perhaps implied, certainly not contradicted, by theories of existential "being", of self-actualisation, of theories of growth and excitement, but it may increase our understanding to explicitly recognise that the organism seeks to confirm its own *sense of aliveness* by evoking responses which will stimulate its sensory apparatus in such a way as to fill and refill the fundamental need to know that it is a nervous, sensing organism capable of *re*action'.

Chapter 2 'A Criterion of Psychological Health' started life as a University of Chicago discussion paper in 1956. Starting from the premise that; 'The health of the therapist is transmitted to the client', Shlien goes on to suggest that one important criterion of psychological health is the ability to listen. Most would recognise this as an important skill or quality in a therapist, but Shlien takes it one step further in proposing that the ability to listen could also be used as a criterion of the client's psychological health and therefore a possible measurable criterion for the efficacy of the therapy. In the present age, where 'evidence based practice' is the name of the game, perhaps someone ought to find a way of developing Shlien's idea?

The next chapter, 'Creativity and Psychological Health' draws attention to the relationship between creativity in its broadest sense and Rogers' 'self actualising tendency'. In this exploration, Shlien

becomes, for me, a bit too stereotypically Person Centred when he asserts that an 'abundant', in terms of conditions and resources, environment is a pre-requisite for creativity. I think I understand what Shlien is getting at in the comparisons he makes between environments where co-ercion is used as a possible motivator and those in which the 'necessary and sufficient' conditions prevail. However, I'm inclined to counter this by mentioning Harry Lime's famous quip in *The Third Man* where he compares the cultural achievements of Renaissance Italy to the Swiss invention of the cuckoo clock!

The next chapter, 'A Client Centred Approach to Schizophrenia' is a *tour de force*, containing such gems as a refutation of biochemical theories of mental illness using the example of diarrhoea which can have both a viral cause *and* be the result of a psychological condition such as anxiety! Shlien presents a convincing case for a psycho-social, rather than a biological, origin of psychosis (Reminiscent of Laing's writing on the subject), a description of the Person Centred Approach (This chapter was originally part of a book called *Psychotherapy of the Psychoses)* and a moving case history. The latter was written before the introduction of anti-psychotics when the only treatments for psychosis were insulin and electric shocks!

'The Psychology of Secrets' looks at the power issues around secrecy from both a social and a therapeutic perspective. In the latter case, Shlien illustrates how Rogers avoids playing the power game which can easily be created in the therapeutic relationship where the client exerts his/her power by holding on to his/her 'secret' and the therapist exerts his/her power by, as Freud puts it 'tearing' the secret from the client.

'Can Therapy Make you Happy?', written in 1989, raises a crucial question for psychotherapists and their clients as well as critiquing some of the 'happiness cults' which flourished in California and other parts of the US in the seventies and eighties. Again, we might want to think about this in relation to the current discussion of measurable outcomes in relation to therapy.

Really, there is so much that is inspirational about this book that there is a temptation to summarise every chapter in this review. Perhaps it would be wise just to mention one chapter I found rather more difficult to get on with, 'A Countertheory of Transference'. This sets up what is to my mind an account of the use of transference as a therapist's defence, which almost all of the psychodynamic therapists I know would find it difficult to recognise as part of their practice. However, I cannot deny that it is well argued and that Freud really did do and say the things that are being used against his theory.

I'd also like to include a quote of Shlien's, from the chapter on 'Empathy in Psychotherapy', which for me sums up the mis-direction

in which some of his fellow countrymen have taken psychotherapy and which is in danger of becoming fashionable in the UK:

'When attitude becomes technique, empathy becomes a product in the marketing of psychology, part of the entertainment vocabulary, and a sort of performance art for therapists.'

There is a lot of inspiration in this book and I would thoroughly recommend it to practitioners from the diploma student to the most experienced trainer.

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Politicizsing the Person-Centred Approach: An Agenda for Social Change. **Edited by Gillian Proctor, Mick Cooper, Pete Sanders and Beryl Malcolm.** PCCS Books, 2006. £20 pb.

For occupations which are so interested in the history of their clients, psychotherapy and counselling pay remarkably little attention to their own history. In fact, they can be positively amnesiac. A case in point is our capacity to forget how explicitly political therapy ('therapy' hereinafter used to imply both forms of psychopractice) has often been. In particular, in the 1960s ands 1970s the then-new schools of humanistic therapy were openly radical in their goals, procedures, and view of human nature. Much of this has been quietly slipped under the carpet – just as many staid middle aged individuals prefer not to mention their earlier record of squats, occupations and demos.

It seems, though, that subterranean stirrings are bringing some of this history to the surface again. I hear that gestaltists, for example, are talking a lot about socio-political issues at the moment; and this book demonstrates that the same is happening in person centred circles. It is a substantial collection, edited by four well-known person-centred figures, and including 31 chapters of a universally high quality, attractively varied in tone, depth, and degree of academic rigour or personal disclosure (a few pieces in fact display both of these!)

This is a very valuable contribution to the literature of psychopolitics. I have to admit, though, that I would be happier to find that at least some of the contributors knew of the considerable literature that already exists. As myself the author of a book called Psychotherapy and Politics, and editor of a journal called Psychotherapy and Politics International, it is dispiriting to find no reference to either anywhere in the book. And as an active member of Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility, it is more than dispiriting to read that a brand new organisation has been created called Person-Centered Practitioners for Social Change.

I don't think I'm just being curmudgeonly here: my disquiet is not personal (well, not much), but – yes – political. Separatism has seldom been a good political option; sometimes it is necessary for oppressed and marginalized groups, but person centred practitioners are scarcely in this position. Yet this whole volume is turned inward, focused exclusively on person centred work, whether to criticise it or (much more often) to celebrate it. Some of the material would be hard to follow without some degree of prior familiarity with the Person Centred Approach. Most authors take a position either of seeking to politicise person centred work (which is, admittedly, the implication of the title – but why only this?), or of discussing how the PCA can politically benefit the world at large. There is no attention paid to the relationship between person centred work and other forms of therapy – surely a political issue; far less to the politics of therapy itself, including the massive issue of state regulation.

Having said all this, it must be emphasised that there are a number of treasures in this collection. My personal favourites include Colin Lago and Sheila Haugh on 'White Counsellor Identity' – probably the single best treatment of racism in therapy that I have read; Khatidja Chantler's incisive critique (which she unfortunately mislabels a 'deconstruction') of several foundational tenets of person centred thinking; and Pete Sanders' 'The Spectacular Self', relating person-centred ideas to Marx's and Debord's account of alienation. All these chapters, and several others, are seriously meaty contributions to psychopolitical thinking. I just wish that they could join up with the rest of us.

Nick Totton

Title: Carl Rogers counsels a black client: Race and culture in person-centred counselling **Editors: Roy Moodley , Colin Lago & Anissa Talahite** Publisher: PCCS Books Date: 2004 Price: £17pb pp.294 ISBN 1-898059-44-6

The sessions explored in this study were originally filmed in 1977. They show a young black man in a state of remission from leukaemia in therapy with Carl Rogers at the Centre for Stuidies of the Person in La Jolla, California. They took place on two consecutive days. The interview on the second day was discussed in the book The Psychotherapy of Carl Rogers, edited by Barry Farber, Debora Brink and Patricia Raskin, but the first one has not been published before. The book starts with summaries of the two sessions. Then come two chapters by Roy Moodley and Barbara Brodley looking back on the second interview. A further chapter, by Germain Lietaer, also comments on this interview. Chapter 6, by Catrin Rhys, Selwyn Black and Shauna Savage, examines the first interview, using conversation

analysis to look at the use of 'mm-hmm' and similar sounds in the session.

Then we get a more general chapter by Sharon Mier & Marge Witty, entitled 'Considerations of race and culture in the practice of nondirective client-centred therapy'. This is quite challenging, saying: 'We have questioned why Carl Rogers' empathic responses… did not frequently include the client's references to racism.' Also looking at both interviews is the next chapter, by Roy Moodley, Geraldine Shipton and Graham Falken, subtitled 'A racial/psychological identity approach'. Again covering the whole gamut is the chapter by Khatidja Chantler, on power and person-centred counselling, which talks about 'the marginalisation of racism' in the two films. Chantler points out that 'Whereas the client mentions race directly 23 times, Rogers only makes four direct responses to these.' This leads us on to a chapter on 'Cultural difference and the core conditions' by Christine Clarke. After these we get a chapter on racial and cultural matching in therapy – 'Three approaches to working crossculturally', by Shukla Dhingra and Richard Saxton. They say: 'It is our contention that, had Rogers responded to the client's references to race and racism, a deeper exploration and understanding of his experience would have been achieved.'

A shift then takes place as we look at a later videotape, with a black client called Dadisi, made in 1985 by Rogers, and exemplifying a more sophisticated approach to racial differences. Colin Lago and Jean Clark find real differences here as compared with the earlier videotapes, and praise Rogers for his increased sensitivity to race.

Then comes an examination of the ways in which all this material might be used on a training course, by Mary Charleton and Melanie Lockett. John McLeod contributes a chapter from a narrative social constructionist approach. William West looks at it all from a humanistic-spiritual view. Susan James and Gary Foster look at it all from the standpoint of culture and hermeneutics. Anissa Talahite and Roy Moodley again examine it all from a theoretical point of view. Then we get six very short chapters by several other people.

At the end we get an interview with Carl Rogers by Michele Baldwin and some excerpts from letter by Carl Rogers to Jean Clark between 1979 and 1983.

This is really quite a strange book, which is why I have been so assiduous in giving a clear picture of it. Nearly all the chapters are short, and some of them are only two or three pages. But I think that anyone interested in questions of race and culture would find this book interesting and valuable, particularly if they are of a person-centred persuasion.

John Rowan