The Person Centred Approach, A contemporary Introduction **Louise Embleton Tudor, Keemar Keemar, Keith Tudor, Joanna Valentine and Mike Worrall** (Pub Palgrave Macmillan PP324 £17.99)

'It's all Carl Rogers' fault', I remarked ironically to a colleague over a pint after a particularly difficult workshop, 'If I hadn't read that book on encounter groups, I wouldn't have done DABS, met Tricia Scott etc, etc and ended up running this workshop!'

Reading and reviewing *The Person Centred Approach* is therefore both a return to my roots and an updating of my knowledge of this model, which forms a key component, if not the basis, of the Humanistic School.

The Person Centred Approach is, perhaps, the best known and the least understood of the approaches to counselling and psychotherapy. It is attractive because of its apparent philosophical and theoretical simplicity and, particularly in an integrative context, is extremely susceptible to 'cherry picking'. We would all love to **be** a Carl Rogers (or even a Dave Mearns or Brian Thorne), but we don't see, or perhaps don't want to see, the self-developmental work that goes into working in this apparently effortless and spontanaeous way.

The appearance of this book is both welcome and timely as a means of clarifying the many misunderstandings of the PCA which the authors acknowledge in their introduction, and for its exploration of the *implications* of the PCA for, amongst other things, training, accreditation, therapists' personal lives and the wider community.

The book is written in four parts – *First Principles, The Person, Implications and Applications and Beyond the Individual, Beyond Therapy*. The first part begins with a chapter, called *First Principles*, in which the underlying philosophy of the PCA is defined and derived, both from its own history and from the existing philosophical schools of existentialism and phenomenology. The influence, contradictory or not, of Christianity is also acknowledged. Key concepts, such as *the organism, the actualising tendency* and especially *the necessary and sufficient conditions* are defined.

The core conditions are explored further in the next chapter, which is focussed on *The Person in Therapy* and traces the psychotherapeutic roots of the PCA, comparing these with the Psychoanalytic Approach.

Given my involvement with counselling training the next chapter was, for me, one of the most thought provoking. The contradiction,

for example, between assessment, accreditation, external validation etc and the development of an *internal locus of evaluation* is obvious when you think about it. But how many of us **do** think about it and how do we maintain our congruence having done so?

One thing I would take issue with in this chapter is the section on 'practice'. Whilst I would broadly agree with the authors' contention that the assumption that clients from voluntary or statutory agencies will be damaged by inexperienced therapists **is** a blunt instrument, I would suggest another way of looking at the issue. Earlier in the same chapter, the authors make the statement:

'the personal development of the student **is** the training'

I have always believed this, but I also believe that there are implications for practice here. What makes a student ready, or not, to see real live clients is, for me, much more a matter of their self-development than their knowledge of theory or even their use of counselling skills. I'm rarely worried that a student gong into counselling practice will actively damage a client, but I am concerned that they may give the client the impression that they're working on the problem whereas, in reality and because of the counsellor's rather than the client's reluctance, they are only discussing it superficially and possibly reinforcing the problem in the process. More to the point and although I have a duty of care towards the clients a student sees, my primary concern is with the student and his/her training experience. I agree with the authors that students come into training with a wealth of life experience, but this can be a double-edged sword. Often, a student's learned way of dealing with emotional distress in themselves and others can run contrary to, for example, the core conditions. It can take considerable self-development work to overcome the tendency to want to control the session, for example, and, given that vulnerable clients may well demand this from the student, there is a strong likelihood that the student is going to end up 'practicing in their mistakes', which any good music teacher will tell you is not a good way to learn. Perhaps I'm illustrating here the 'thought provoking' I referred to earlier!

The next section of the book consists of three chapters which deal with the development and view of the person in the PCA. The first explores Rogers' developmental theories and, again, contrasts these with the psychoanalytic model. This is a comprehensive account and incorporates findings from neuroscience, which substantiate Rogers' original ideas.

The next chapter, *Personality* continues this exploration and works towards Rogers' theory of personality and behaviour, which supports the actualising tendency of the human organism. I found the following chapter *The Person in Context* inspiring in its approach to such thorny issues as 'Anti-oppressive practice'. This is epitomised by statements such as:

'…we are critical of the political correctness of the "equal Opportunities" industry, particularly rife in local authorities and the voluntary sector ,which simply adds another "oppression" to the list, whilst doing little or nothing to make their services equally accessible. Political Correctness has become an issue of compliance and compliance breeds resentment.'

I also liked the section on Personal Power in this chapter.

In the next section, *Implications and Applications* the authors explore the extrapolation of the Person Centred Approach to couple and family relationships, education and politics. This is important because often therapy is seen as something isolated from the rest of human experience.

Chapter 8 explores the relationship from a PCA standpoint. The impression I get is that, aside from identifying four 'trends or themes' in relationships, Rogers himself didn't seem to work with the relationship as such, but a lot of his work can be usefully applied to the relationship. Similarly, whilst it is very useful to apply the PCA to parenting, contributions from other models such as Winnicott's work and systems theory are equally useful.

In contrast, chapter 10 *Freedom to Learn* is extremely powerful in applying, for example, the core conditions, only slightly modified, to the learning process. This, and the incorporation of Paulo Freire's ideas on education contribute to the delight of this chapter. I particularly liked the way issues which are endemic in counselling training are addressed, especially the negotiation of the relationship between the organic needs of the learning group and the demands of outside authorities, validating bodies and accrediting organisations.

The final chapter in this section, *The Person of Today – and Tomorrow,* moved me almost as much as Rogers' book on encounter groups did in the mid seventies, perhaps because it revived in me the idea that change **is** possible even in monolithic, controlling cultures.

The last section of the book *Beyond the Individual, Beyond Therapy* widens the field of application of the PCA to couples, groups, the community, organisations and the environment itself. The chapter on couples work was interesting, but, as the authors acknowledge in their summary:

'Practitioners differ about whether or not person-centred principles are sufficient for work with couples'

As I remarked earlier, my therapeutic journey began with person centred group-work so I was interested to read the next chapter on the application of the PCA to groups. I particularly liked the differentiation between structure and directivity. These are often confused by comparatively experienced practitioners as well as students and beginners.

I learned a lot from the following chapter on *Community,* particularly about the learning community, which is often problematic in the counselling training context. The interface of psychotherapy and politics is always interesting to me and I believe that small-scale community interventions are the most positive expression of this.

The seeds of the next chapter *Organisation* could be found in the DABS course [The Diploma in Applied Behavioural Sciences at what was then The Polytechnic of North London] in the 1970's. I like the way the core conditions are applied to the consultation process in an OD setting and can see how this would work constructively. I have less faith in an organisation which was totally person centred, although this may be my scepticism creeping in.

Eco-psychology is becoming more recognised at the moment, and the final chapter, which looks at the application of the PCA to environmental issues, would appear to be going in that direction. This involves seeing the Earth as an organism, à la Lovelock, with an actualising tendency of its own.

The authors are to be congratulated on this very clear exposition of the Person Centred Approach, which I would recommend to trainees, new and experienced practitioners and especially to trainers.

Geoff Lamb

The Wisdom of the Psyche – Depth Psychology after Neuroscience **By Ginette Paris** (Pub Routledge £12.99 pp240)

When Geoff Lamb sent me this book for review, I was puzzled. I'm not a neuroscientist and, although I always say there's a spiritual dimension to my work and I've gained a lot from reading authors such as Thomas Moore, I don't think of myself as a Jungian. I was relieved to find, when I read it, that there was very little actual neuroscience – the emphasis is on the *after* in the title. It was also a pleasure to be re-introduced to some of the Jungian – I think perhaps I should say post-Jungian - ideas which I have, as I said, come across in Thomas Moore's work.

Ginette Paris bases her work on her very human, or humanistic, account of her personal process following a near fatal accident. She explores her thoughts on the state of contemporary psychotherapy and also her own process in becoming a therapist together with the influence, on both of these, of coming face to face with her own death.

The Preface sets the scene. It gives just enough biographical information and therapeutic background so that the reader who may not be familiar with Ms Paris' work gets a sense of who she is and where her life had got to before the accident. It also explores the literal and metaphorical significance of death.

The first chapter describes the accident. The author fell into an empty cement pool and cracked her head on the bottom. She talks about her experience of intensive care and the thoughts and images which drifted through her mind in her state of semi-consciousness. It's inspiring to read about her experience of nearly, but not quite, dying. I was surprised, and then again not, by the description of her regression in the arms of her daughter and the subsequent healing of her brain haemorrhage. This, according to her consultant, is most often observed in young children rather than women in their fifties.

The next chapter, post operative one might say, is a meditation or, as the author puts it, a fable on three archetypes – the Archetypal child, the Great Mother and the Archetypal Father. She introduces each of these characters before giving an imaginary dialogue between the Archetypal Child and each of the others. This outlines the elements of each archetype, which have a bearing on the growing up process and I found it very moving.

In the next four chapters, Ms Paris deconstructs four 'versions' of what therapy is about. These are: 'Therapy as Cure – The Medical Model', 'Therapy as Investment – the Economic Model', 'Therapy as Plea – the Legal Model' and 'Therapy as Redemption'. Although most people will be as familiar as I am with the differences of opinion which surround the medical model of psychotherapy and counselling, the other 'models' were new to me. When I say 'new', of course they make perfect sense when you think about them, but **I** certainly haven't considered them in depth before I read this book.

In Chapter 3, 'Therapy as Cure', Ms Paris gives a lovely example of an inappropriate attempt to 'cure' a young boy of his 'pathological' response to the death of his beloved dog. I was very moved by the story of how his grandmother had come to stay with the family, supported the boy in staying off school, talked with him at length about death and mortality and finally ritually buried the dog's remains in the back garden.

I don't know whether the idea of therapy 'as investment' is more common in the United States than in the UK. Certainly, in the field of publicly funded therapy, the arguments of Layard and his colleagues seem to be pushing it in that direction. Ms Paris seems to recognise some of her own 'drivenness' in this chapter, perhaps as a result of the accident. She also, I was interested to see, deconstructs the polarity which seems to exist between cognitive approaches and depth psychology. To do this, she uses an example from her work with violent men. These men were suffering, she says, from: 'a poverty of language, an incapacity to translate their frustration, anger and disappointment into words.'

She felt that the cognitive approach was appropriate because it involved the 'un-learning' of an inappropriate response and the

development of the capacity to communicate with words – something she feels should have been fostered in these men as they grew up.

'Therapy as Plea' looks at blame or accusation in therapy, particularly family or couple therapy, and the tendency of the therapist to be cast in the role of Judge and/or jury. It is certainly tempting, when we're trying to support a client, to side with him/her against the partner/mother/father/boss – whoever seems to have been behaving abusively, meanly or is just plain 'out of order' towards the client. The problem is, as Ms Paris points out, that you end up 'imprisoning' your client in the 'victim position' for life.

I wonder if 'Therapy as Redemption' as explored in the next chapter, is yet more subtle than the other three? More and more humanistic therapists are claiming a 'transpersonal' aspect to their work and I don't blame them for that. Many of my colleagues say their work wouldn't make sense without a spiritual dimension. But therapy, says Ms Paris, doesn't bring about absolution or perfection. The nitty gritty of everyday life still has to be negotiated and grappled with, however much therapy we've had. The only difference is that we do this consciously. Therapy, whilst it can certainly contribute to the individual's spiritual journey shouldn't be confused, according to Ms Paris, with the journey itself.

It always seems to me that therapy lives on the cusp between science and the humanities. In the next chapter, Ms Paris explores this curious interface as well as the dilemma of where to put Depth Psychology.

The autobiographical element re-asserts itself in the following chapter and, since her brother is a philosopher, uses their relationship to explore the relationship between philosophy and psychology.

This chapter flows neatly into the next, which revisits the archetype of Mother. Ms Paris broadens the scope of this archetype to include not only male parents who bring up children single-handedly, but also to comment on the lack of 'mother energy' in contemporary American society.

She comments too, in the next chapter, on the lack of 'Father energy' in the US today and in the field of therapy. In both of these chapters, she includes her views on the predominant monotheistic religions and what she considers their detrimental effect on humanity's psychic development. Here, and in her acknowledgement of her own feminist views, which sometimes seem at odds with her explorations of myth and legend, she is bolder in her outlook than Thomas Moore, who seems to sit on the fence sometimes.

This expression of social commentary is further developed in the next two chapters, 'The Invisibility of the Psyche' and 'The Ultimate Virtual Reality Game'. In the first she relates the 'invisibility' of psychological distress today with the same invisibility of physical suffering in mediaeval times i.e. because there's so much of it and

we don't think we can do anything about it, it just becomes part of life.

In 'The Ultimate Virtual Reality Game', Ms Paris explores the subjectivity of story yelling, with a particular focus on the way we tell our own story in therapy. I like the way she validates this subjectivity and also the way she isn't afraid to challenge some of the myths about psychotherapy, including rigid interpretations of what constitutes sexual abuse, which she links with the fundamentalist Christian beliefs of some therapists. I was also relieved to read her critique of Lacan's prose style. I haven't read much, but I always thought I wasn't clever enough to understand it!

The last chapter 'Joy: the antidote to anxiety' contains some gems. Ms Paris differentiates between anxiety and fear and argues strongly that both are, in their own way, healthy responses of human beings with consciousness living in the world. As anxiety, along with depression, is said to be one of the most endemic problems in therapy and counselling, this chapter ought to be compulsory reading for those involved in finding 'treatments' for these conditions.

As I said at the beginning, I wouldn't normally have picked up this book on the basis of its title, but I'm very glad I read it and would thoroughly recommend it to new and experienced therapists of all orientations.

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