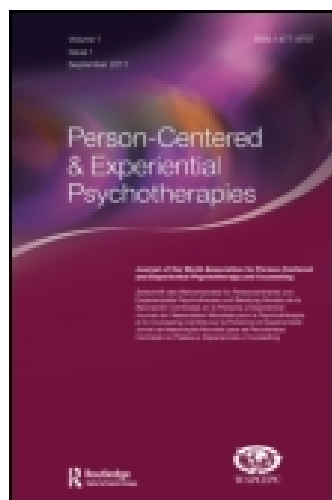


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Psychotherapy is political or it is not psychotherapy: The person-centered approach as an essentially political venture

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Psychotherapy is political or it is not psychotherapy: The person-centered approach as an essentially political venture

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Reflecting on the state of the art of person-centered therapy (PCT), and drawing upon the original understanding of politics as the consequence of an image of the human being, this paper argues that a political understanding (as politics, policy, and polity) is essentially inherent in the person-centered approach. It discusses the policies of psychotherapeutic orientations and stresses the democratic and emancipatory stance of PCT. It concludes that we need a *notification of dispute* among the different approaches to the person in society and sketches a *political way of being* for therapists.¹

Keywords: politics; democracy; actualizing tendency; personalization; dialogue

Psychotherapie ist politisch oder sie ist nicht Psychotherapie: Der Personenzentrierte Ansatz als von seinem Wesen her politisches Unterfangen

Dieser Artikel zeigt auf, dass ein politisches Verständnis des PCA zu seinem Wesen gehört. Ursprünglich ist Politik (als *policy*, *politics* und *polity*, d.h. in normativ-inhaltlicher, prozessualer und formal-institutioneller Hinsicht) als Konsequenz eines Menschenbildes zu verstehen. Darauf und auf dem State of the Art Personenzentrierter Therapie aufbauend wird die in den verschiedenen psychotherapeutischen Schulen inhärente Politik diskutiert, und der demokratische und emanzipatorische Standpunkt Personenzentrierter Therapie hervorgehoben. Schließlich wird eine Konfliktanzeige bzw. Streitverkündung zum Thema der verschiedenen Herangehensweisen an die Person und die Gesellschaft gefordert und ein “politischer way of being” für Therapeuten und Therapeutinnen skizziert.

La psicoterapia es política o no es psicoterapia: El enfoque centrado en la persona como una aventura esencialmente política

Reflexionando sobre el estado del arte de la terapia centrada en la persona (TCP) y basándonos en la mirada original de la política como consecuencia de una imagen del ser humano, este escrito sostiene que una comprensión política (como la política, las políticas y la organización política) es esencialmente inherente en el enfoque centrado en la persona. Discute las políticas de de los enfoques psicoterapéuticos y destaca la postura democrática y emancipadora del ECP. Llega a la conclusión de que necesitamos un *aviso de discusión* entre los diferentes enfoques acerca de la persona en la sociedad y esboza una *forma de ser política* para los terapeutas.

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La psychothérapie est politique ou elle n'est pas de la psychothérapie: L'approche centrée-sur-la-personne en tant qu'entreprise politique

Réfléchissant sur l'état actuelle des connaissances dans la thérapie-centrée-sur-la-personne (ACP) et en partant de la compréhension originelle de la politique en tant que conséquence d'une image de l'être humain, cet article pose et argumente qu'une compréhension politique (le processus politique, la position de principe et l'entité ou la forme politique) est essentiellement inhérente à l'ACP. Il propose une discussion des positions politiques des orientations psychothérapeutiques et met l'accent sur la posture démocratique et émancipatrice de l'ACP. L'article conclut que nous avons besoin d'une *annonce de dispute* par rapport aux différentes approches de la personne dans la société et esquisse une *manière politique d'être* pour les thérapeutes.

A psicoterapia é política, ou não é psicoterapia: A abordagem centrada na pessoa como empreendimento essencialmente político

Ao refletir acerca do estado de arte da terapia centrada na pessoa (TCP) e ao basear-se na compreensão inicial da política enquanto consequência da imagem do ser humano, este artigo debate que um entendimento político (da política, dos procedimentos e dos regimes) é inerente à essência da abordagem centrada na pessoa. Discutem-se os procedimentos das orientações psicoterapêuticas e enfatiza-se a postura democrática e emancipatória da TCP. Conclui-se que precisamos de uma *notificação de conflito* entre as diferentes abordagens da pessoa na sociedade e delinea-se um *jeito de ser político* para os terapeutas.

心理療法は政治的である、そうでなければ心理療法ではない パーソン・センタード・アプローチは本質的に政治的な冒険である

パーソン・センタード・セラピー (PCT) の最新の状況を反省し、そして政治とは人間のイメージの結果であるという原義的理解に基づき、本稿はパーソン・センタード・アプローチにとって、(政治活動、政策、統治組織としての) 政治的理解が本来備わる本質であり不可欠なものであると論じる。各種の心理療法的オリエンテーションが持つ政策を論じ、PCT の民主的・解放的姿勢を強調する。社会における個人に対して異なるアプローチを持つオリエンテーションの間には異議申立書が必要であると結論づけ、セラピストにとっての政治的なあり方を描く。

*I consider it important, indeed necessary,
for intellectual workers to come together,
both to protect their own economic status
and, also, generally speaking, to secure their influence in the political field.*
Albert Einstein

When we think about politics in the context of counseling and psychotherapy, topics that may come to our mind include a health service and social security system that guarantee therapeutic supply for everybody; the dispute with the traditional medical model and conventional psychiatry in order to oppose medico-centrism; and the politics of the helping professions and their institutions in order to establish the professions and guarantee their influence. But there is a much more fundamental issue: the understanding of the person-centered approach (PCA) as a politically relevant approach in itself: an understanding that came up quite early in the history of the PCA.

This paper argues that a reductionist understanding of politics does harm to the understanding of what it means to be a person-centered psychotherapist. An understanding that only takes one of the possible dimensions of *being* a political person, and therefore fails to understand and practice psychotherapy as a political enterprise, does not fully grasp the notion and impact of what it means to facilitate self-empowerment and community-building. What follows from this is that to act according to an image of the human being means to act politically and vice versa.

First, the paper looks at Rogers's explicit and implicit view of politics. Then it looks into the history of the notion and understanding of *politics*, showing that the original understanding of politics as the consequence of an image of the human being helps us to understand the profound anthropological and ethical meaning of psychotherapy as politics in all its dimensions. The paper sheds light on the fact that a fully *personal* understanding brings to the fore that everyone is a politician whether they see themselves in this way or do not acknowledge this. From this it follows that to be a person-centered therapist means to be a politician (in the full meaning of the term *political* as policy, politics and polity). The paper gives some examples of what this means and enumerates some challenges and tasks. Finally I argue for a plea for discourse and dispute among the different schools of therapy in respect to their political self-understanding and impact.

Rogers, the PCA, and politics

Carl Rogers's understanding of politics

For a long time, Carl Rogers had some hesitation in admitting the political dimension of his work. Richard Farson's (1974) designation of Rogers as a *social revolutionary* led Rogers, according to his own words (1977, p. 4) in the late 70s to become a political person. Rogers admitted that this late awareness was caused by the fact that the term *politics* only recently had become relevant beyond the state level in the USA.

Rogers's understanding of politics was oriented towards power and control. Accordingly "the politics of the PCA" to him was "a conscious renunciation and avoidance by the therapist of all control over, or decision-making for, the client." The focus is on the facilitation of *self-ownership*, on the client's self-responsibility, and on the strategies to achieve this goal. The locus of decision-making is "politically centered in the client" (1977, p. 14). Rogers went on to reflect upon the threat for the therapist of losing power in the traditional sense of the word, when the power stays with the client. He critically deals with other approaches, including the humanistic, demonstrating their inconsistency when they regard the therapist as an expert on the one hand and stress the self-responsibility of the client on the other hand – a critique currently relevant more than ever.

But there is much more: Rogers understood the theoretical foundations, even the image of the human being itself, as political (1977, pp. 237–251). In talking about an organismic foundation of the actualizing tendency, he regarded the *nature* of the human being itself as political. For Rogers, the alienation of human beings from their constructive actualizing tendency, from their nature, is the source of suffering. Therefore the attitudes and actions developed out of the PCA's image of the human being are more than a therapeutic enterprise. Together with the epistemological implications and the underlying philosophy of science, this view represents a

fundamental socio-political claim. Accordingly he regarded his work as a *quiet revolution* on the way to a “new political figure” (1977, p. 254), to a “person of tomorrow” (Rogers, 1969).

He formulated six theses (1977, p. 28) as the “politics of the helping professions”:

- (1) A sensitive person, trying to be of help, becomes more person-centered, no matter what orientation she starts from, because she finds that approach more effective.
- (2) When you are focused on the person, diagnostic labels become largely irrelevant.
- (3) The traditional medical model in psychotherapy is discovered to be largely in opposition to person-centeredness.
- (4) It is found that those who can create an effective person-centered relationship do not necessarily come from the professionally trained group.
- (5) The more this person-centered approach is implemented and put into practice, the more it is found to challenge hierarchical models of *treatment* and hierarchical methods of organization.
- (6) The very effectiveness of this unified person-centered approach constitutes a threat to professionals, administrators, and others, and steps are taken – consciously and unconsciously – to destroy it. It is too revolutionary.

Political awareness in the PCA

Throughout the history of the PCA we find authors who have been dealing with political questions. Politics plays a role for Peggy Natiello (2001), Maureen O'Hara (2007), John K. Wood (2007), John Vasconcellos (2007), Gillian Proctor (2002), Katidja Chantler (2004), Christoph Fischer (2001), Mick Cooper (2007), Pete Sanders (2007 and other authors in this book) and others. Feminist approaches, minority issues, gay and lesbian issues and others are prominently represented, for example, by Carol Wolter-Gustafson (2004), Gillian Proctor and Mary Beth Napier (2004), Marietta Winkler (2002), Renata Fuchs (1999) and others; a special issue of *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapy* (Keys & Prüller-Jagenteufl, 2008) kept up and continued the matter. An excellent overview and continuation can be found in the book by Proctor, Cooper, Sanders and Malcolm (2006). In it Seamus Nash (2006, p. 29), following Rogers, argued that there is “a political imperative inherent within the person-centred approach.”

So, the subject – politics and the PCA – is well represented. However, the claim expressed in the title of this paper touches the foundations. An emancipatory psychotherapeutic approach that takes its foundational assumptions seriously must not only be aware of its political *implications*: understanding, investigating, formulating, developing them ... it must be *actively* political.

Of course the PCA's image of the human being influences the work in private practice and clinic, in training and supervision, in pedagogy, social and pastoral work, research, science, etc. Although no one can deny or ignore this influence, the impact goes far beyond the political dimension of person-centered thinking and activities in the relatively comfortable, isolated setting in the *closet* of the practitioner and the ivory tower of the academic. The approach, by its very nature, is a socially

critical and thus socio-political approach: a fundamental program for a *therapy* of the society, a psychotherapy and *sociotherapy* (in the meaning of a therapy of and for society). The approach by its very nature is a program for radical societal transformation and thus (socio-) political change.

What does *political* mean?

The original understanding of politics as the consequence of an image of the human being

A look into the history does not only shed light on the original understanding but proves that the understanding of politics is a consequence of the understanding of the nature of the human being.

The word *politics* derives from the Greek *πολις* (*polis*), the city-state. The *polis* originally denoted the castle of a city (e.g., the acropolis) and the settlement itself, later the city and finally the *autarkic* (i.e., self-sufficient), political unit – the city and the hinterland and the body of citizens. (The equivalent Latin word was *civitas*.) In the *polis*, law, culture, cult, military, education, entertainment and market were regulated by collective decisions. This provided a beneficial living together for the people inside the community and joint activity on the outside, and therefore identity and security. The political community intended to balance the autarky deficits of the individual.

Exactly according to this meaning, Aristotle (384–322 BC), in his *Politika* (III, 6), understood the human being as a being oriented toward the *polis*, “a being relying on civic community by nature,” as ζῶον πολιτικόν (*zoon politikon*), a social, political being that actively develops in the community. This means that the human being in the community – and only in it – can actualize their potential fully; that only in the community can they fully become humans. This community is the intellectual, cultural and legal frame in which the human being lives and acts and strives toward self-realization. Thus politics is the creation of an order that serves this goal.

It is not by chance that the definition of politics derives from the definition of the human being and vice versa. Politics is the consequence of an image of the human being. Or the other way round: From a certain image of the human being follows inevitably political action.

This ultimately means that *everyone is a politician*.

Greek philosophy already understood politics not only as the common public affairs, but also in a synthesis of politics and ethics, as the creation of a good political order, the *politeia*, and the realization of the *bonum commune*, the public good – further developed in modern democracy theories.

The classical understanding: Politics reduced to power issues

Political theories from Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) (with his doctrine of the clever use of power and the shrewd planning of the means to obtain and maintain power) onwards – including Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) to Max Weber (1864–1920) – altogether reduce politics to the art of gaining, distributing and preserving power and so to a technique of ruling and statesmanship. Therefore all these theories are subject to a reduced understanding of politics in which it is understood as deriving from power. Consequently power becomes an end in itself. Max Weber's

(1921/1980) influential theory, according to which power means to exercise one's will also against resistance, allegedly free of any value judgment for reasons of philosophy of science, finally *freed* politics completely from the human person and made room for a so-called *political realism*.

So, politics has become a matter for politicians, something that cannot be a possibility or even a task for every individual – with fatal future consequences also for the politics of psychotherapy. Politics is regarded as the job of professional politicians and they act according to the just-mentioned understanding of power: they argue over power.

The three dimensions of politics

Political science is a young science, similar to psychotherapy science; its beginning was in the 19th century. Like psychotherapy, politics understands itself as a discipline of practical philosophy.

Political science distinguishes between *policy* (the contents), *politics* (the process) and *polity* (the form).

Policy: The normative dimension

Policy denotes the *contents*: the different topics and their solutions to problems, including the political decisions. The matters to deal with are (particularly in pluralistic societies) different normative ideas, that is, tasks and goals, of politics. In regard to a political party or a government the term describes their goals and actions – different according to distinct ideas and systems of value and justice. These values are detectable from the fiscal side, what they want to spend money on.

Politics: The process dimension

Politics is about the *process* of the formulation of political demands and objectives and about the decision procedures, that is, conflict resolution and decision making. Here power and its enforcement within formal and informal rules play a decisive role, as do the selection of people in leadership functions, the search for approval, and the coordination with other interests and demands.

Polity: The formal, institutional dimension

Polity deals with the *form*, the political orders and their structure of norms (e.g., constitutions, international agreements) and the institutions (e.g., parliaments). This includes distinct ideas about orders and the rules of a community, such as the rule of law, separation of powers or guarantee of freedom and civil rights. Furthermore, the political culture with its typical patterns of order and behavior belongs to polity. Besides the *written* constitution that exists in most countries, albeit not in the UK, there is the *unwritten* constitution, often more important than the written one.

To summarize: Politics – as general term – is the realization of policy with the help of politics based on polity (Nuscheler, 1999; Patzelt, 2007; Pelinka, 2004; Rohe, 1994).

Psychotherapy as politics

What does that mean for psychotherapy and counseling? If it is true that politics is the consequence of an image of the human being, this means that to act according to an image of the human being means to act politically. (And whoever reduces politics to the dimension of power issues implicitly demonstrates their values regarding the image of the human being.)

Psychotherapy is political as policy, politics and polity

You cannot be not political or act not politically. In each of the aforementioned meanings psychotherapy is political. It cannot be separated from policy, politics and polity.

With regard to *policy* the question is which concept of values of a certain therapeutic orientation you subscribe to: repair, adaptation and skill training; or emancipation, autonomy and solidarity, freedom of choice and responsibility. As mentioned above, according to Rogers, the concept of human nature with its actualizing tendency, itself, is a political basis. For person-centered therapists this means to check what they do carefully and thoroughly to ensure it is in line with their assumptions of the self-directing disposition of the human being. Regarding *politics*, the question is about the procedures, the means with which these values are put into practice – in therapy and beyond it. From a person-centered standpoint this means in therapy to refrain from control over the client and from imposing one's will and goals; instead to experience empathy and acknowledgment and to encounter. And, beyond therapy, for the political discourse in society, a person-centered stance implies an attitude of facilitating the awareness for respecting the person-centered values. This happens in two ways: by understanding the views and values of others, as well as confronting them by explicating one's own values and principles (e.g., through the formulation of political demands and objectives, engagement in working with media, etc.). This is what Rogers (1977) was talking about when he called his own way "a quiet revolution." And with regard to *polity* the task is to care about the framework, the formal and informal structural conditions, the institutions which we have to deal with and the institutions which we set up. This is about the health service, the therapy associations, the university institutes, international cooperation, worldwide associations, journals, etc.

Psychotherapy as politics therefore means:

- to realize the prevailing conditions, the established political culture (polity)
- in order to stand up for our image of the human being with its values (policy)
- in an appropriate and adequate way (politics)
- aiming at a change of the political culture (policy). (See also Sanders, 2007, p. 6.)

It goes without saying that policy, politics and polity must be congruent: that means and procedures and institutions must go together with the basic principles and programs – although this obviously sometimes seems to be quite difficult to realize.

As mentioned before, in reality, psychotherapy politics is much about polity and politics and not much about policy. Therefore in what follows I shall concentrate on the foundational principles.

The policies of psychotherapeutic orientations

Concerning these principles when talking about the politics of psychotherapy we have to ask what the theoretical and practical consequences are of a certain psychotherapeutic orientation. And here it is definitely true that *psychotherapy* must be understood as a political activity or it fails as psychotherapy.

What today goes by the name of psychotherapy and counseling might include adaptation, relaxation, (better or worse) advice giving, complex and highly efficient crisis management, optimally planned steering of behavior in order to reach desired results, managing of all kinds with a strong fondness for problems, diverse kinds of coaching (in general, today, there is management and coaching: *life management* and *problem coaching*), esoteric promise of salvation, solution-centered and self-surpassing inventing of techniques, sophisticated, self-enthusiastic and self-over-rating analyzing and explaining of the world, wittily formulated tele-diagnoses and television analyses and less witty image cultivation or better showmanship and pseudo-elucidation of the public by prominent faces – you can find any form of *care* in any situation from procreation to burial, whatever you might think of.

All these activities carry certain political implications and are based on certain values. They are different forms of social engineering or social control. But all these do not deserve to be called psychotherapy, if this word is connected with personality development in an emancipatory meaning.

One may object that psychotherapy and politics are basically two different levels of discourse that must not be mixed up: psychotherapy is about understanding and politics is about change. (“My job is to be a therapist, to listen and understand; others should care about politics!”) However, as a matter of fact, both therapy and politics are about understanding *and* change. On the basis of a personal attitude, a split of these would be fatal. The person-centered position that understanding means changing, that change comes about by understanding hits the point: Both are about *en-counter*, that is, being together and being counter. (To understand certainly does not mean to agree and to change does not mean to devalue or belittle the other’s position.)

The obvious consequence is conflict and dispute. The consequence is a clash of opinions. The consequence is to deliberately get into an argument. The statement that psychotherapy is unavoidably political intends to state the necessity of bringing into the societal discourse what we have learned in and from therapy, loudly, clearly and unmistakably.

Therefore dispute is necessary. This will be a dispute between two basically different paradigms. This will be a political discourse – a discourse primarily about the understanding of politics as such, that is, the prevailing present-day understanding of everyday life on the one hand, the ruling doctrine, the doctrine of the ruling, of those in power, on the other hand. (Of course this will need a culture of dispute – which, for quite a lot of person-centered people, is definitely an area for development.)

Spheres of discourse regarding policy in society from a person-centered stance

Thus psychotherapy always means to engage in the discourse of policy and raise one’s voice clearly and unambiguously where psychotherapists and counselors have a role to play and something to contribute. Based on (the below referenced) earlier writings about basic terms it can be proved that all person-centered core terms are

highly politically relevant. Here are a few keywords which, of course, need careful consideration, in order that they are not used as meaningless catchphrases.

- If we come from *substantial-relational dialectics* (as it is inherent in the understanding of what it means to regard the human being as a *person*, a term that equally comprises independence and interconnectedness; see Schmid, 1991/2009, 1994, 1998a, 2007), then it is clear that the facilitation of autonomy and of successful relationships is of prime and fundamental importance for human beings. This is a political task. To Rogers (1977, p. 248) estrangement was *the* basic pattern of all psychological pathology. This means that the danger of alienation is to be found in any place where the human being is not aware of their personhood in all its dimensions. Thus the furthering of authenticity – both as consciousness and as congruence and genuineness in relationships – is indeed a political task (Fischer, 2001; Schmid, 2001).
- If we are convinced that the understanding of psychotherapy as the art of *encounter* (see Barrett-Lennard, 2005; Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Rogers, 1962; Schmid, 1994, 1998b, 2006, 2008a) leads to view psychotherapy as a *Thou–I relationship* (Schmid, 2006) and that the essence of being human is *dialogue*, that dialogue is the basis for the appearance and unfolding of the original sociality of the human being (Levinas, 1989, pp. 73–77), that the person *is* dialogue from the very beginning and that the PCA unveils the dialogical quality already there (see Cooper, 2006; Schmid, 2006, 2007, 2008b), then the dialogical situation has to be taken seriously, above all else, both in the therapeutic setting and beyond the therapy room. Consequently it is a task of prime importance in all areas of social life to foster and demand situations where dialogue can occur, or – to be precise – cannot be suppressed. This is a political task.
- If we are convinced that the person-centered concept of *empowerment* (not the fashionable use of it that means everything and nothing) is a political program par excellence, that it is central to the personality development of each individual, then we need to bring spontaneity and creativity into all areas of life (Schmid, 1996a, pp. 455–468). Spontaneity and creativity are a radical change of power per se (Sainer, 1975, p. 62): spontaneous and creative people are much more immune to dependency.
- If we come from the conviction that the epistemological and therapeutic change of paradigms *from analyzing and diagnosing to co-creating* is the foundation on which to keep and to confirm the dignity of our fellow human beings, then the fostering of participation and self-determination is a political program and not only a therapeutic way to proceed, let alone a method. As a consequence, it is necessary to form a counter-public, a counter-awareness against falling for diagnoses or the fetishism of natural science and empiricism. Here we also have to enter the (political) discourse and argue about the matter within the person-centered and experiential *family*, namely which goals, implicit and explicit, our orientation shall pursue.
- If we are aware that the PCA is a *social* psychology by its very nature and are therefore *convinced that life springs not from the Self but from the primary We* (see Schmid 2002b, 2003; Schmid & Mearns, 2006), then values like tolerance, solidarity, justice, support of and for minorities and discriminated people are not a consequence but a foundation and must be demanded. It goes without saying that this is a political task that requires the courage of one's convictions.

- If we assert that *the group is the primary place*, where people learn how to live life, where problems originate and also can be dealt with and solved (see Schmid, 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Schmid & O'Hara, 2007), then the setting up and facilitation of appropriate groups, characterized by self-steering, self-responsibility and self-help, is a political task.
- If we know that, according to our experiences in encounter groups and large groups, *self-determined group processes* constitute an incredible potential for development, and that guidance, leadership, and management are functions and tasks of the group and not the job of the “strong man or woman,” then we have experience and knowledge from which the facilitation of democracy and its development can benefit highly – a political task of prime importance.
- If we value the nature of the asymmetry of a Thou–I relationship and thus the importance of taking the other as truly an *Other*, if we thus understand our profession as *practical social ethics* (see Schmid, 1994, 1996a, 2003), then it is a political task to raise our voice for all who, at best, speak in our practices, if at all they find their way to the therapy room: minorities, discriminated people, the ignored, laughed at, underprivileged. (It is not by coincidence that feminists, gay and lesbian people, to name only two groups in our culture, and politically suppressed people all over the world, discovered the PCA rightly as an approach that allows them to express themselves.)
- And finally, if the human being's *actualizing tendency* is not simply an inner force of the individual, but essentially a relationship-oriented and social construct and therefore a *personalizing tendency*, characterized by freedom and creativity (Schmid, 1994, pp. 413–423, 2008a) and fostered by the *presence* of the Other (Schmid, 2002a), then we are obliged to interfere in structures and institutions that are hindering instead of creatively fostering personalization. Instead of remaining in *noble* silence, psychotherapists and counselors must bring the program of becoming a person, of creative personalization, into the societal discourse much more forcefully.

To summarize: If psychotherapy understands itself in this way, then psychotherapists and counselors have an ethical duty to act politically. It is a question of the conception of oneself, of self-esteem and the responsibility to understand oneself in these professions as a political being and to act accordingly.

Notification of dispute

If we take the afore-sketched comprehension of psychotherapy on the basis of its image of the human being seriously, then not more or less than the dispute between remaining dependent on and controlled by authority – ultimately totalitarianism – on the one hand and democracy on the other hand is at stake, between indoctrination and emancipation, between either dominance, misuse of power and control or participation and sharing. To render it in person-centered jargon: it is the dispute between the patient and the person.

It does not come as a surprise that practitioners and theoreticians in many countries and workgroups plead for debate and against adaptation and a system-regulating role of psychotherapy and counseling (see, e.g., the conference “Psychotherapy and Politics: Realising the Potential,” University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 2009; Fischer, 2001; Proctor et al., 2006). In the light of the present

development of health politics, more and more therapists are convinced that it is definitely the *kairos* (the very moment) for a notification of dispute. The quiet revolution sometimes and in some ways has been too quiet. Therapists refer to the development in Germany, for example, where adaptation and compromise has led to the denial of recognition of PCT by social security authorities. They refer to Rogers who, admittedly under different circumstances, tried harder: he, the psychologist, made it to become professor in both Psychology and Psychiatry departments in Wisconsin. They refer to his horror vision (Rogers, 1977, p. 260), that we will have to give up freedom in order to survive, a threat that in an era of counter-measures against terrorism seems to be more relevant than ever.

For a “political way of being”:

- We need to understand that the classical three dimensions of being in therapy, that is, to empathize, acknowledge unconditionally and respond authentically, imply the classical three *political* steps: to observe, form an opinion, and act accordingly.
- To be able to do so we need political education.
- We need social criticism as an indispensable part of psychotherapeutic theory development, practice and training.
- We need media policy as an obligatory part of psychotherapeutic theory development, practice and training.
- This requires that we leave the closet of our own private practice and the study and engage politically. Therapists need to publicly, politically voice and fight for what they know out of their experience with clients. This requires co-operation with other orientations that pursue similar goals and an open, critical discussion with all those who support the status quo.
- This requires co-operation with other disciplines and professions.
- Last, but not least, this requires steadfastness. If the goals are personalization and dialogue, there must be no compromise with regard to the essential issues.

What the PCA has to offer is the recovery of conviction in relationship – a necessary prerequisite for democracy – the excavation of the foundational dialogical situation, the trust in the creativity of personalization.

So, all can be summarized in one simple sentence: each psychotherapist and counselor faces the challenge to politically take sides – which can happen in many, very different ways. But it does not happen if we do not speak up or turn on the computer. We need to raise our voices when the milieu is shaped in which our clients live, which promotes and furthers their life and our own life or damages and destroys it. We need to oppose any kind of therapy that repairs the individual and does not think of changing or destroying that which destroys the *human* beings. We need to come out of the therapy room and promote the consequences of what we experience in the therapies in public.

Discourse among the therapeutic schools

This also means to take a stand in the inter-therapeutic discourse. To develop one's own identity involves the development of a political identity – which makes it necessary to take a stand and not shrink from debate and not place one's hopes in ignoring or sealing oneself off or believe in “anything goes.”

The widespread ignorance of the position of the PCA must also be seen as a phenomenon of resistance, both in the course of the further development of the therapeutic schools – which in the meantime all more or less emphasize the importance of relationship and celebrate the re-discovery of the person (without caring for referencing the pioneers, Rogers and the PCA) and the watering down and playing down the radical positions of the PCA by those branches within the PCE therapies that tend to give up the core values and dissolve into a general psychology. That others copy, even imitate, and follow the PCA in many aspects may cost us a smile or cause us to get annoyed. The background is not ridiculous or annoying at all: the PCA is a threat for all therapists who subscribe to a traditional understanding of power, an understanding following Weber's definition. Rogers (e.g., 1977, p. 16: "It was in its [client-centered therapy's] *politics* that it was most threatening") clearly recognized this. The destruction he talked about can also happen through self-deprecation, or undervaluing ourselves.

Conclusion: The most personal is the most political

A psychotherapist or counselor who does not care about politics in fact does harm to their clients. To be apolitical means to stabilize, to fortify the status quo. If psychotherapists do not raise their voices in society, they do not take themselves or their clients seriously. They contribute to cement in, or reinforce, the current circumstances.

No more or less than the political culture of psychotherapists and counselors is at stake. Doing psychotherapy and at the same time being politically disengaged or claiming to be non-political is not only cowardliness; it is simply irresponsible.

Like maybe no other psychotherapeutic orientation, the PCA's image of the human being includes a political program and the approach claims to be political. Thus, it challenges the entire community of psychotherapists and counselors.

To summarize: unconditional positive regard definitely has a political dimension. This kind of love (in a meaning that is clearly defined in the PCA, see Rogers 1951, pp. 159–172; Schmid, 1996, pp. 533–540) is a political force. It challenges structures and hierarchies, breaks up suppression, totalitarianism, self-satisfaction, contentment, narcissism, idleness. It opens up authenticity, transparency, sincerity, unpredictability, desire to change, free discourse and reliability.

Personalization is necessarily also a political process and therefore a political program. It was the message of the early feminist movement that the personal is political. The actualizing tendency as a personalizing tendency is necessarily also a political tendency, a tendency to become a political being. Rogers (1961, p. 26) said that *the most personal is the most universal* – and we need to add – *is the most political*.

Note

1. Based on keynotes given at the IPS Symposium, Vienna, April, 2007 and the 3rd BAPCA Conference, Cirencester, UK, September, 2007. I want to thank Mick Cooper and three reviewers for their help with the paper.

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