



# The Good Life and the Fully Functioning Person

## Background

In 1961, Carl Rogers' book *On Becoming a Person* was published. This took the form of a collection of essays, including 'A Therapist's View of the Good Life: The Fully Functioning Person', adapted from a similar piece that Rogers had originally written in the early 1950s during a winter break to a warmer place. The essay 'was an attempt to spell out the picture of the person who would emerge if therapy were maximally successful' (1961, p. 183).

## Key Message

Rogers' key message in the essay is that the good life is not a fixed state in which the person feels actualised and happy. Instead, Rogers sees the good life as a process, through which a person who has the psychological freedom to move in any direction can go.

Rogers noted that the organismically selected direction has certain features that are shared between individuals, no matter what the detail of their lives may be.

## Characteristics of the Process

Rogers describes three characteristics of the good-life process:

- *increasing openness to experience* (whether deriving from inside or outside the person) – which he characterises as being the opposite of defensiveness

- *increasingly existential living* – in other words, relinquishing control and becoming more able to live fully in the present moment, and so allowing the self and the personality to emerge from experience rather than contorting experience to fit the self-concept
- *increasing trust in one's own organism* – which refers to trusting that the organism knows how to behave in a more satisfying way in any given situation, through knowing their needs, memories, perceptions, demands etc.

## The Process of Functioning More Fully

Taken together, these three characteristics mean that a person living the good life:

- moves in the direction of becoming a more fully functioning person
- can live fully in and with all their feelings and reactions
- increasingly uses their whole organism to sense accurately their internal and external situation
- uses all the information provided by their nervous system, while recognising that their total organism may often be wiser than their awareness
- can trust their total organism to select the most satisfying behaviour, knowing they can be fully open to the consequences and correct actions that lack satisfaction
- can experience all their feelings without fearing them
- relies on self alone to sift evidence, and is more open to evidence from all sources
- is completely engaged in the process of being and becoming themselves, so discovering that they are social
- lives more fully in the present moment, and recognises this as being always the soundest way to live
- is becoming a more fully functioning organism, and thus person.

## Reference

Rogers, C. (1961). *On Becoming a Person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Constable.