



CRITICISMS OF PERSON CENTRED THERAPY

Over the years client centred therapy, sometimes referred to as the Person Centred approach, has come in for some criticisms.

We are going to explore some criticisms which includes one that is new to me.

The first is what could be classified as a **sociological critique**: the idea that the very roots of PCT are founded in a specific country and, more to the point, gained prominence in a specific period in history.

To quote a passage from the book, *Restless Nation*, the author James M. Jasper points out the stark contrast between the European and American Psyche in this quote:

One historian of psychotherapy compares European pessimism about the interior self with American optimism: “The European cure was to control through the practices of ‘*self-domination*,’ the American cure was to control by revitalising the self through practises of ‘*self-liberation*.”

Even the America unconscious was good.

America in the 1950s and 60s was a nation of unparalleled economic growth. Untouched structurally by World War II, the factories that built military equipment for the war effort, now produced consumer goods, from cars to dishwashers. The economy boomed.

This huge surge in optimism gave rise to the term ‘The American Dream’, the belief that with hard work anyone could do anything.

In this sociological environment, Rogers' ideas of self-actualisation; organismic self-valuing; and humanistic psychology, a term coined by Abraham Maslow, found a willing audience.

Contrast this with a war-ravaged Europe, where towns and infrastructure were destroyed and the economy was in tatters.

It's also worth observing that in Europe, the dominant ideas on the human psyche were Sigmund Freud's, who saw the human condition in what could be described as both pessimistic and self-destructive.

This leads on to the **second sociological critique of Rogers**: his idea of the human personality having a tendency to be basically good.

His critics point out that if this was the case, how come millions of people were murdered by seemingly ordinary people during the atrocities in concentration camps across Nazi-occupied Europe?

Are humans basically good as Rogers hypothesised?

The second argument against Rogers's ideas is that the notion of the core conditions being necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change to occur, may not be true in some client presentations.

Treating some forms of depression, or historic issues generated from childhood experiences such as abuse or abandonment, may need a more structured therapeutic approach.

People in recovery from substance abuse may also need a more structured form of therapy, which includes tasks and goal-setting strategies.

Some people who have a psychopathic personality may not sense at any level the warmth of the therapist.

Clients may not want to be passive recipients of therapy but may want to take a more active role in their recovery, by being taught psychological techniques or completing 'homework tasks' between sessions.

One of the most popular criticisms is referred to as the 'Masson Critique'.

In 1990 Jeffery Masson PhD, a former psychotherapist, published a book entitled *Against Therapy*.

In it he critiqued all the main schools of therapy. In the chapter entitled 'The problem with benevolence', Masson turned his attention to the work of Carl Rogers:

“What guarantee is there, what guarantee could there possibly be, that any given therapist is the genuine person Rogers posits him to be? The unconditional positive regard that Rogers wants the therapist to feel is something that cannot be legislated into existence any more than can love...”

“Unconditional positive regard’ is not something that seems either likely or desirable.”
(Masson 1990 , 234)

In other words the way of being, encapsulated in how the therapist offers the client the conditions of empathy, congruence and un-conditional positive regard, is no more than a ‘professional façade’, an act put on for the therapy to work.

Finally, a criticism that was new to me, was posted in the Facebook group page, by a contributor named Dianne and I will refer to this critique as a *theological perspective*.

It is an written by Father Brian Bartley, a priest at the Diocese of Toronto who holds a BA from the University of Toronto in Political Science and Sociology. He states in an essay:

According to Stanton and Butman, the philosophical presupposition underlying Person-Centred therapy ought to raise a number of concerns for the Christian.

First of all, it is assumed we are the ultimate force and sole masters of our own destiny – all authority is within. They emphasize that according to our faith, the “Self” is not all there is and should not be the center of what is. ‘In the Christian tradition,’ they say, ‘to proclaim oneself to be in control of one’s own existence is the ultimate act of rebellion.’

As we come to the end of this discussion, it is worth remembering that despite these criticisms, Rogers’ work is still considered a relevant and effective therapy.

This is backed up by numerous research studies. It also forms the basis of building a trusting, safe relationship with clients in more active directive therapies such as CBT or TA, where a more structured approach may be needed or indeed requested by the client.

References

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