

# Carl Rogers

## Some Unanswered Questions

In the last fifty years quite a body of facts, hypotheses, and speculations have accumulated in what is called “the person-centered approach.’ The following list, compiled by Carl Rogers, represents persistent questions which have been posed by Rogers, his colleagues, and critics. The list is produced here with the hope of stimulating research and debate.

1. We are often asked, how do we account for evil or the dark side of human nature, the shadow side? How do we explain irrational violence and the rising crime rate, etc.? My own feeling is that we have an answer to this question, but I am not sure that it is an adequate answer.

2. Is the stress on the self and the individual, the emphasis on individual freedom and choice, merely an American or Western cultural phenomenon, or is it inter-culturally basic? (In China, for example, a popular slogan is “Fight self, serve the people.’ In their minds, and in their behavior, the people as a whole, and the country as a whole, come definitely before any right of individual freedom or choice.)

3. Why is it we have been demonstrably successful in changing persons and their relationships and their behavior, and yet relatively unsuccessful in changing organizations and institutions? Our successes in this last respect are definitely modest.

4. How does a person-centered approach relate to a national or international political process? We have proceeded by means of intercultural workshops. Are there other things that we should be undertaking?

5. Does our focus on the individual reduce the likelihood of social consciousness and social change? Put very briefly, does personal growth and the development of a community spirit defuse the coming revolution? This is a question often asked by Marxists and other groups that believe that society must be overthrown rather than transformed.

6. There is a growing interest in psychic phenomena and altered states of consciousness. What is the relation of a person-centered approach to this developing field? I am speaking here not only of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and the like, but the energy fields, healing energy, auras, and so forth. There seems to be no conflict, but is there a relationship?

7. A closely related question is, how does a person-centered approach relate to man’s spiritual quest? We have ‘always helped people explore themselves and their circumstances. Is a person-centered approach also geared to helping them explore experiences in areas which transcend themselves?

8. In the 1950s, Carl developed a rigorous statement of theory, described briefly in Client-Centered Therapy and expressed much more fully in Koch, Psychology: A Study of a Science, Vol. III. Is this theory still adequate to explain the phenomena of psychotherapy and personality change? Are major revisions needed? Should it be re-examined and restated?

9. How can experiential and cognitive learning best be integrated? We are exploring this question in our ongoing learning programs, but I feel we are far from a complete or thorough answer.

10. Should cognitive integration always accompany experiential learning? If not, why not? If so why? And how can it be accomplished?

11. We have often been successful in building harmonious workshop communities. Yet these are brief experiences of one to two weeks. Are we capable of building a viable person-centered community, which extends over years? I believe our experience with such groups is limited. Of course there would always be strife and difference and strong feeling and confrontation in building a community. But are we able to build a viable long-lived community in which people can work together openly and express feelings openly? I think that question has only partially been answered.

12. In workshops or learning experiences the staff is often differentiated from the participants. Is the ultimate person-centered approach a situation in which no such distinction would be made, in which all would be participants and all would share the power?

13. A question of interest to which we do not have even a beginning answer is, what would research look like if it were based on the new concepts of science? What would it mean to undertake research in which we were dealing with reciprocal causation, not linear causation...where it is recognized that in considerable measure we create reality, not merely observe it?

14. We have endeavored to function in relationships on the basis of an open expression of feelings, working through differences. Why is it that some of the oldest Oriental cultures, such as Japan and China are opposed to free expression of feelings and endeavor to keep things smooth, to save face, to avoid any expression of negative emotion in relationships?

15. A final question: is this approach, in which persons are trusted and the basic nature of man is regarded as constructive and the emphasis is on openness, sharing and good will -- is this approach doomed to be overwhelmed by those who believe in aggressive domination by power? For example, the early Hawaiians and the Hopi live ways remarkably similar to a person-centered approach, yet they were completely overwhelmed by aggressive powerful cultures. Is this also to be our fate?

Journey, Vol 1, Number 1, 1981