

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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Gillian Proctor drew her opening remarks to this book to an end with the sentence,

This is a gathering of many different voices; a range of contributions from academic theorizing and critical analysis through personal testimony, and description of radical projects to practical suggestions for change. (p. 4)

Regardless of whether you have dipped in and out of the book or read it from cover to cover, the truth of Gillian's statement will have become apparent. The variety of contributions in style and content is, and I don't use this word lightly, amazing. The book excercises those parts not usually reached by person-centred publications. Readers have been taken from pure theory through personal reflection to community action. After excursions into personality development, centuries-old ethnic conflict and many projects to improve social conditions and interpersonal relations, we end up with the *realpolitik* of a political speech.

This volume repeatedly visits the tension between the individual and the community in thought, word and deed, and like a puppy worrying a favourite slipper, it will not let go. And with so many voices, the effect is, thankfully, disconcerting. Just when the reader gets a comfortable confirmation of their views, they meet something challenging, unpalatable even, and so the exercise continues.

After reading and re-reading these writings in the editorial process, I was struck by the number of themes that kept recurring, independent and unbidden, from a variety of contributions. So, to conclude the book, and by way of reflection, I offer a few of these themes that seem to be arising when politics and the person-centred approach come together. I hope it is not too obvious to suggest that each of these themes could have arisen in many books with a political bent. There is something of the soundbite about them. However, I find it uncomfortable to contemplate why they don't figure more widely, other than peicemeal, when person-centred practitioners convene. I hope I can live up to at least some of the improved expectations of myself I have after contact with this work.

POWER

Power is possibly the least surprising theme to emerge, since critics and advocates alike believe that the PCA has something to offer in the debate on power in relationships. However, it is clear that person-centred practitioners are no longer (indeed if they ever were) naïve as to its importance or the fact that *regardless* of non-directive intent, structural and role power is implicit in all helping relationships. We find person-centred practitioners wrestling with the implications of Proctor's (2002) analysis of power and person-centered therapy. In addition to analysis, several authors in this book bring their personal struggles with, and tentative solutions to, the issue.

ALIENATION

Notwithstanding it having been mentioned in a chapter title, alienation is referred to in a number of chapters. Although it is not a term used by Rogers—he used the term ‘estrangement’ to describe the disjunction between self and experience (Rogers, 1959: 226)—the concept is clearly equivalent. In various places throughout the book, contributors allude to and discuss alienation from experience, from our ‘real selves’, from each other, from the world. It is noteworthy that, in recent years, the concept has enjoying something of a mini-renaissance and is being more widely discussed. This should not be surprising when we consider the person-centred interest in ‘connection’, ‘community’, encounter and dialogic approaches. What, after all, is connection and encounter the antidote to?

INDIVIDUALISM/COMMUNALISM

Here we find another ubiquitous tension, this time one that seems to give human relations the tautness required to play the tune of life. It may well be a good thing that we can never resolve the dilemma of ‘individual’ versus ‘society’, since it contributes so much energy not only to the debate but to our everyday actions. It is the stuff of which politics is made and keeps re-presenting itself in many chapters. The person-centred approach has traditionally been located (some would say *located itself*) at the individualist pole of this dimension and some contributors defend this position whilst others question it. The very fact that it keeps creeping in to personal accounts and theoretical analyses is testimony to its ubiquity. That it continues to be ‘outed’ and discussed in a person-centred forum can only be a good sign.

CULTURAL ISSUES

A clutch of chapters go to the uncomfortable centre of a rarely uttered question—can there really be a shortcoming in the theory or practice of person-centred

approaches to therapy and wider applications? Is the PCA ethnocentric; rooted in Western culture and largely unfit or inappropriate without modification to other cultures? The frequency with which practitioners with non-White ethnic origins persist in asking this question demands proper consideration and a respectful answer. For obvious reasons their experiences must not be dismissed, but also because we are not seeking to establish person-centred theory as a universal totalizing discourse in therapy. We are trying to give voice to all participants in the debate about how we live with ourselves and each other. To that extent at least, the person-centred approach has a unique political contribution to make.

EMPATHY

It is interesting that, of the so-called person-centred ‘core’ conditions, empathy is the one that recurs more frequently as a theme. It would seem that, for this collection of writers at least, the mindful effort genuinely to understand the other person is the beginning of person-centred politics. Careful research would be required to separate issues of communication from empathy, since both figure strongly in this book, however, Reinhold Stipsits appears to embrace both the need for clarity and the open, undefensive cordial intent that might just make such empathic communication ‘politics enough’ (Stipsits, this volume, p. 253)

ACTION

Finally, weaving through the theory, value statements and personal reflection is the almost omnipresent call to action. Person-centred practitioners contemplating political presence speak with practically one voice: thinking and feeling, whilst necessary, are not sufficient, it would appear. *Being* is not enough—*doing* completes the picture. When separated, not only are being and doing are both the poorer, but so is the whole human race, connected as we are.

To be whole political entities, we each need to act, whether in our individual domain of influence or in community with others. Interestingly it doesn’t seem to matter what we do, as long as our doing remains true to our values, but *doing*, it would seem, is one of the ways we can reconnect with our experience, each other and the world.

REFERENCES

- Proctor, G (2002) *The Dynamics of Power in Counselling and Psychotherapy: Ethics, politics and practice*. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.