For Those Seeking Therapy

or a Career in Therapy

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Over the years that I've been presenting my perspective on existence I've had a number of psychologists and psychiatrists write to me asking how they might be able work with their clients in a way that would fall in line with my sensibility.

The one problem they had is that they weren't able to find any psychotherapeutic theory they could use in their work. They wrote to me asking if I knew of such a theory.

And fortunately, I do.

Essentially, I'm always presenting the notion that everything in existence is a mysterious movement with an inherent urge to move the way it moves.

There are many individuals and philosophies that have echoed this sense of existence from the very beginning of recorded history to now. None of this is new.

In the 1950's Carl Rogers developed the concept of a formative tendency as the foundation of a person's growth.

He viewed the universe, and everything in it, as a flowing process that had an inherent urge, a formative tendency, to move the way it moves.

His psychological term, the "actualising tendency", refers to the formative urge in living organisms and Rogers saw that urge as the foundation of all aspects of human development.

He asserted that the actualising tendency drives everything in living organisms. It is an urge inherent in the human organism to grow, to develop, and to fulfill a unique potential in a certain way. In the same way that any flower in nature grows, develops, and blossoms as the unique flower that nature needs it to be.

Nature is diverse in its expressions, so every flower is unique, one of a kind, and so is every person.

The flower has an essential urge to become the flower that it must be. That urge is written into the fiber of its being. Rogers felt that everything in existence has its own urge for development written into it.

His realization of this urge came from seeing a sack of potatoes in the corner of a very dark basement. Those potatoes were putting forth new sprouts that were reaching out two or three feet in length towards the very tiny bit of light coming through the only window in the basement.

As I write this, I'm feeling that must have been a very poignant moment, seeing those potatoes desperately reaching out for the only heathy thing in their environment and their only chance at continuing to live.

Rogers realized that we all have this inherent urge to survive and grow.

The effects of this urge can be distorted or stunted by unfavorable, inadequate, or destructive environments, like that dark basement was for those potatoes.

A person living in a bleak, or repressive, environment that will not allow their formative urge to fully express itself cannot develop self-concepts that are in harmony with the unique expression of nature they are and so, they cannot live authentically as the expression they need to be. These distorted, or stunted situations, create the need for therapy.

Therapy presents a healthy environment for the natural functioning of someone's formative urge, the urge we all have to become a unique expression.

A healthy therapeutic environment allows a person's formative urge to function in complete ways that overcome the effects of the earlier unhealthy environment.

The result of this is that a person's sense of themselves becomes more authentic, and their behavior becomes more complete and healthful, more naturally who they need to be and are meant to be.

Under healthy circumstances, a person who is free to acknowledge and feel their actual process in a very complete and honest way develops self-concepts that are in harmony with the living process that they are and they live authentically, according to who they truly are and what they truly value.

Rogers felt that a healthy life is a process; it's a movement. He felt that there are three ongoing characteristics of a fully functioning person.

1. A willingness to feel the living process they are, in a very complete and direct way.

2. A willingness to live as a fluid event, continuously unfolding throughout one's life.
3. A willingness to trust one's deepest feelings, urges, intuitions as the only guide for living.

For Rogers, it is the ongoing process of these three inclinations in an individual that determines the extent of their psychological health.

The fundamental notion in this approach to health is that we can trust the formative urge that's written into the fiber of our being and the essential role of a parent/friend/therapist is to support the unique urge in each person to become who they must be.

Wholeness and health are not a matter of perfecting oneself according to someone's idealized fantasy. Instead, it's a matter of living fully as the unique individual you actually are, the unique individual that nature is needing to express.

From this approach a therapist is simply someone who supports and nurtures the natural expression of someone's urge to become a unique individual.

A supporter's only task is to listen with respect and understanding, to help clarify the client's feelings and thoughts as they are actually occurring.

The supporter offers three things:

1. Honesty and authenticity in their own being, offering an example of sensitivity, clarity and harmony in their own unique thoughts and feelings.
2. Unconditional acceptance of the client for who they are as a unique being.
3. An understanding of the client's frame of reference, listening to the unique way a person expresses themself and hearing as clearly as possible what that person is truly saying and feeling, in order to help clarify their experience of their unique process.

This involves:

1. Trusting and respecting the client as the only authority on their development.
2. Never pushing the client in any direction other than the direction that feels most right to them.
3. Relating to the thoughts of the client as clearly as possible, to help bring clarity to what they're feeling and expressing.
4. Understanding that any person is always doing the best they can in any moment to be the unique being they need to be.

5. Understanding that the psychological difficulties of an individual are due to that person not acknowledging and honoring their unique process in a clear way and not being allowed to be the unique being they need to be.

The clue to understanding any person's behavior is that they are always moving toward being the expression that nature needs them to be. This will eventually become clearer and clearer over time.

In Rogers' approach the therapist simply provides a safe and supportive environment for the client's unique expression to function fully.

This approach is in fundamental agreement with a nondual sense of existence along with a nondual sense of human health and development.

It is obviously the same as Ramana Maharshi's succinct, one-line-response to people, when they asked what they should do in life. He replied, "**Just be what you are."** This is most essentially the response of anyone who has **a nondual sense of existence.**

For anyone wanting more information about Carl Rogers and his approach to therapy, you can read his very popular book, “On Becoming a Person.”

If the approach to therapy described in this paper feels right to you and you might want to seek therapy from someone trained specifically in Rogers’ approach, look for someone trained in Person-Centered (Rogerian) Therapy.

However, over the years since Rogers’ death many Rogerian therapists have mixed in other theories, to the extent that some ignore his complete faith in, and focus on, **the actualizing tendency**. If you want to find someone who still has this very simple faith and focus, just have them read this article and see if they agree with the approach that it describes.

The contents of this article and its assessment of Rogers’ approach to life and human development is what I’ve been able to gather in reading many accounts of his life and work, both general and academic.

As always, I incline to what I feel are the most essential aspects of any subject. I have used easy to understand examples in this article to explain the core elements in Rogers therapeutic approach. His psychological theory is

usually presented in much more formal academic detail overall, but those formal details are all related to the core elements that I've presented here in simplified form.

And **let's be very clear**, as Rogers grew older in the course of his life and work, he came to focus completely on the actualizing tendency as the only important element in a person's life and development.

For certain specifics presented in this article, I am referencing an online paper titled "Actualisation: A Functional Concept in Client-Centered Therapy", authored by Bozarth, Jerold D; Brodley, Barbara Temaner. **Journal of Social Behavior and Personality**; Corte Madera, CA Vol. 6, Iss. 5, (Mar 1, 1991): 45.