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[Publications](#)

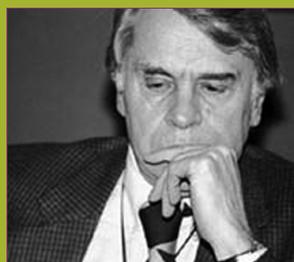
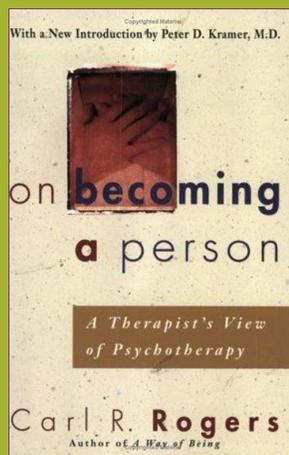
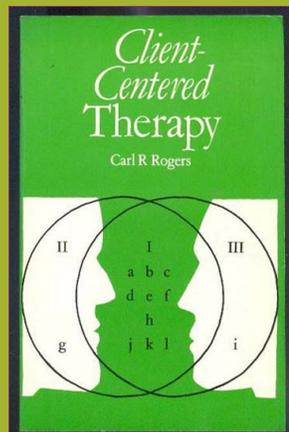
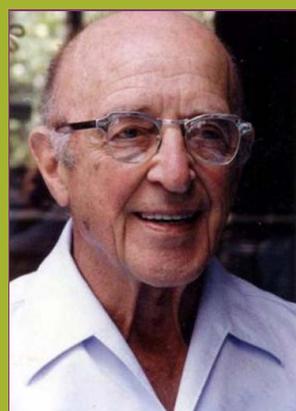
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1951 Carl Rogers

The importance of empathy



Carl Rogers (1902-1987) is generally regarded as responsible for the earliest forms of humanistic psychology and person-centred therapy. The key principle of the Rogerian approach is essentially very simple: take people's accounts seriously because they are the basis for helping people to achieve self-actualisation by finding their true identity as a fully-functioning individual. Rogers was one of the first psychologists to talk about clients rather than patients and he laid the foundation for a wide variety of non-directive techniques, based on reflective listening, known as 'mirroring'.

Humanistic psychology, developed by leading thinkers such as Abraham Maslow and Ronald Laing, has had a substantial impact on models of psychotherapy, child development and pedagogy. It has left traces in almost all kinds of verbal therapy and child rearing practices, including through the influential writings of Benjamin Spock. Together with Maslow's work, Rogers' ideas have become the building blocks for the so-called 'good life' of the human development movement.

Rogers' view on human development anticipated the counter cultural and radical political movements of the sixties and seventies, when authorities all across the Western world were challenged by citizens asserting their own individuality and claiming their rights as citizens. This is the context in which Carl Rogers' thinking became very popular. Indeed, in 1974 his colleague Abraham Maslow labelled his work as 'revolutionary'. The euphoric optimism associated with Rogers' approach lasted until the end of the seventies, when the North American cultural historian Christopher Lasch set out some of the disadvantages of too much emphasis on personal growth and what was termed 'me-ism'. In his book *The culture of narcissism* (1979), Lasch criticised humanistic psychology as encouraging people to glorify themselves at the expense of concern and kindness for others. In the conservative *New Republic* journal, he once argued that "as the founding father of humanistic psychology, the human potential movement, and the encounter group, Carl Rogers has a lot to answer for".

Rogers had formulated his thinking long before the sixties and seventies. He developed the core ideas and applications after he finished his training in psychology and started working with children. He distanced his work from traditional psycho-analysis and started to devise his own forms of therapy. Becoming a professor in 1940 allowed him to use his extensive experience as a therapist to develop theories about what came to be known as person-centred humanistic practice. He published several books on the subject, of which *Client Centered Therapy, its current practice, implications and theory* (1951) and *Psychotherapy and Personality Change* (1954) can be considered the most important.

The starting point for Carl Rogers was that people experience their lives as a subjective reality and develop a sense of 'self' through processes of self-evaluation, feedback and reflection. Successful 'self-realisation' is achieved through the gradual establishment of a coherent self-image or identity. Rogers maintained that individuals have a strong need for positive feedback, especially during youth, but also during later stages in life. For a person to develop as a fully functioning individual, this feedback from significant others must be based on what he called 'unconditional positive regard', otherwise they may set up 'defence mechanisms' and harmful, even pathological, personality strategies. If this happens, person-centred therapy may offer the solution but for this to be effective, Rogers argued that the therapist must adopt three core principles. They should encourage the client to achieve *congruence* between their actual and ideal 'selves' by demonstrating *unconditional positive regard* and *empathy* for their situation and feelings.

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