

Preface

Should a humanistic approach pervade science? Will humanists accept science, spirituality, and other assertions from discrepant disciplines? Does the intersection of human values and scientific findings offer unique opportunities to understand and improve the world we live in?

As human beings, we are responsible for unique creations such as the arts or achievements in science and technology—for example, being wirelessly connected with friends and colleagues all over the world. Equally, however, humans are responsible for unbelievable cruelty, destruction, and pain, as in war, nuclear explosions, or through starvation in vast areas of our world. From this we believe that, as the human species, our make-up is highly generic and adaptable, such as to include vast capacities for the constructive, forward moving but equally—and we pause to write this—capacity for the extremely destructive.

Acknowledging this, we are deeply convinced that, to strengthen the constructive potential, we need to contribute to promoting those socio-environmental conditions that research and practice in the person-centered, humanistic orientation has been confirming worldwide, across all continents since more than half a century. Briefly, the conditions of experiencing and mutually communicating empathic understanding, acceptance, and genuineness have countlessly been confirmed across many disciplines to bring to the forefront the inherent, constructive talents in humans. This holds true for individual persons as well as for groups of small and large sizes, covering homogeneity as well as diversity. Hence we feel these socio-environmental conditions are key to the solution of real problems, even of problems and crises of enormous size that seem to require, first of all, (inter)personal immersion, encounter, mutual understanding, and a loosening of rigidly held mental models. This is because problems such as climate change or financial crises or starvation cannot be solved by a single genius or even a single scientific discipline. These problems often are problems of the commons—problems that can only be solved through cooperative effort, often across nations, cultures, and disciplines. Solutions for individuals can actually make the problem harder to solve as they obscure the problem or make it more of a concern for one group than another (see chapter by Fisher in this volume).

Historically, the socio-environmental conditions, which promote the constructive sides of humans and bring along the flourishing of persons and groups, were described and investigated by Carl Rogers and his co-workers about 60 years ago. Rogers formulated a consistent theoretical framework, which embraces his humanistic view of mankind and growth-promoting interpersonal relationships. Over the last years, progress in the human sciences has yielded many significant research findings which are, from our point of view, closely related to key features (such as subception, organismic valuing, self-organization, etc.) of the theoretical framework of Rogers and thus the person-centered approach (PCA). These insights can help to understand the theories of the PCA more fully from a scientific perspective and might even support their social assimilation.

These and similar thoughts come up in our minds when trying to justify our initiative for editing this book. Frankly, to share from the most inner sense of our initiative, we were motivated towards this project by a feeling. It is a feeling born out of our own experience with the PCA and our being in this world that makes us sense that this project is the right thing to do at this time. It requires us to divide our limited time resources between this project and other responsibilities, but, in any case, it feels right to enjoy working on this book. Our huge supply of intrinsic motivation seems to come from each of our own experiencing, our knowledge, as well as from our appreciation of working together on a project we called into life. This is perhaps the more honest explanation why we are editing this book and feel so fortunate that we found Springer Science+Business Media as a renowned publisher as well as top contributors from several disciplines to help us in our bridge-building endeavor.

Not to be misunderstood, when we are saying that reciprocally perceiving person-centered attitudes of empathic understanding, acceptance, and congruence “are key to the solution of real problems” what we absolutely do not intend is to argue that they are all we need. That would be ridiculous. Equally, we do not intend to downplay the invaluable contributions of other disciplines, schools, and theories. What we do, however, endeavor is to build bridges from a person-centered, experiential approach, an approach that equally values the implicit and the explicit processes, to many other disciplines. This is to join forces with them, thereby *never* losing or departing from our deepest human basis—a whole person approach, as originally expressed in the life work of Carl Rogers (1902–1987), or expressed even more broadly, an empathically attuned, self-organizing whole environment approach (Rogers 1983).

More theoretically, the PCA can be seen as providing one meta-model that can help connect many fields of study. It provides a parsimonious explanation and an astonishingly straightforward and elegant theory on how to move forward to address those dimensions of the unique challenges of the present and the future that concern interaction within and between people. It offers constructs that have been supported from many fields of study, but are largely unknown to other fields. To be fully assimilated and understood, however, the constructs of the PCA need to be experienced. This is a limitation of the/any book that readers can overcome only when experiencing a person-centered climate. Nevertheless, this book

endeavors to highlight the parsimony, unknown research support, and links within the PCA and from it to various fields of study. While this book focuses on research and theory, the accompanying *Interdisciplinary Applications of the Person-Centered Approach* is devoted to exploring the PCA practice in a multitude of areas including clinical applications, supporting children and families, education, management and leadership, conflict management, and international communication.

The major contribution of this book together with its “sibling book” on applications is to identify and characterize the key bridges—so far only partly recognized—between the PCA and several other disciplines. Crossing these bridges will reveal that scientific disciplines were growing parallel to and decades after the PCA whereby scientific advances occurred with little recognition of the mutuality with and foreshadowing from the PCA. Consequently, the books’ main themes and objectives are to:

- Explore the power, depth, and scientific impact of the PCA through its relationship to a broad variety of disciplines.
- Articulate how the theory of PCA is consistent with influential disciplines and in fact has foreshadowed some (e.g., neurosciences, positive psychology, and learner-centered education).
- Propose an integrative framework and conceptual map to depict more of the “geography” surrounding the PCA.
- Respond to international calls for interdisciplinary studies that facilitate dialogue and cooperation with other disciplines to stimulate new ideas and solve twenty-first century problems, such as the tragedies of the commons, globalization woes, and intercultural understanding.
- Introduce people who are less or not familiar with the PCA to reveal it as a meta-approach with widespread scientific support, integrative potential, and influential applications.
- Help those who identify, research, and practice within the PCA—largely psychotherapists, but also educators, consultants, negotiators, coaches, nonviolent facilitators, etc.—to engage with a broader literature, find scientific dialogue with compatible findings from other disciplines, and have increased appreciation for other disciplines.
- Illustrate the importance of the PCA for the research paradigms and competencies to approach and solve the challenges of the world of today and tomorrow.
- Stimulate further research and theory development by identifying open questions.
- Contribute to help us move forward as a human species, regardless of which culture or spiritual tradition we may come from.

Overview and Structure of the Book

This book is set out to be a unique contribution to the literature in so far as it throws fresh light on the *scientific contribution* and foresight of the PCA. It is accompanied by a “sibling book” focusing on the broad, practical *application*, and impact of the PCA. The innovative approach taken in both books is to provide readers with a multidisciplinary and multi-perspective view. Beyond the original psychotherapy theories and applications (client-centered, experiential, emotion-focused, child-centered, motivational interviewing, existential, filial, etc.), influential derived theories and applications have included motivation, mindfulness, interpersonal relationships and group work, cross-cultural communication, parenting, social work and care for people with special needs, learner-centered education, technology-enhanced learning environments, human relations leadership training, life coaching, person-centered medicine, etc.

The book is structured as follows: The first section is an invitation to bridge-building. It introduces the reader to how this book came into being, to the conceptual essence of the PCA, and the broad range of phenomena—research, theory—and disciplines—arts, philosophy, science—in which the PCA interlinks.

Parts 2–8 provide the main part provides transdisciplinary chapters, linking diverse disciplines with the PCA, including neuro- and cognitive science, developmental relating, positive psychology, systems theory, and mindfulness, philosophy, and spirituality. The editors provide concept maps that show how one can understand various chapters’ contributions as to “bridge-building” with the PCA.

A reflective and linking section rounds-up the book and points to the “sibling book” that explores PCA applications. It is that “sibling book” that in its very end provides a meta-view on the PCA. It is intended as a generic framework to be specialized for each area at hand such as to reach a broad understanding and be applied or explored through further research or application such as to stimulate further engagement with all the ramifying impacts. This final meta-view chapter was assigned to the second book because it draws upon the research, theories, *as well as* applications substantiated in both “sibling books.”

The editors trust you will explore the book in the way that best fits you. Moving through as designed or jumping from topic to topic as your interest or need motivates you! Readers who are new to person-centered thought may want to read the introduction first and thereafter proceed whichever way they prefer.

Reference

Rogers, C. R. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80s*. Columbus: Charles Merrill.

Interdisciplinary Handbook of the Person-Centered
Approach

Research and Theory

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