

**Carl R. Rogers:
Person Centered Therapy, Learner Centered Facilitation, Humanistic Education**

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Carl Rogers (January 8, 1902- February 4, 1987) was born and grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, near Chicago. He is one of the few American psychologists to be considered giants in the field, and his American spirit can be traced to ancestors in the USA since the 1600s. He was the fourth of six children in a devout conservative Christian family who prayed together in a circle each morning. He learned to read before Kindergarten and read extensively. As a child, he was shy and kept sheltered by his family, and did not have close friends. He became very interested in science, particularly through the study and practice of agriculture, and spent a considerable time playing outside, in the woods, and cataloguing moths.

Carl began school at age 7. He went to undergrad at the University of Wisconsin and embarked on a life-changing trip to China and the Far East at age 20 as a representative of the YMCA to the World Student Christian Conference in 1922, when he was 20 years old. He interacted daily with future Nobel Peace Prize winners, and had shorter interactions with world leaders, like the Chancellor of Germany and the Mayor of Seoul, but also made it a point to interact with commoners throughout the poverty stricken and oppressed regions he visited. His view of Christianity became increasingly existential.

Upon his return, he was quickly wed and switched his major to agriculture, after which he decided to study the ministry at a liberal Christian school and then completed a Ph.D. from Columbia Teachers College in Psychology.

Carl worked as a psychologist in Rochester New York with children and veterans, then began his professorship at the University of Ohio. He was invited to start one of the earliest college counseling centers in a professorship at the University of Chicago. It was at these two locations that the seminal works in the person-centered approach were written. He then conducted a large study on schizophrenia at the University of Wisconsin, where he had begun his academic career, and lead encounter group and social justice movements in California and around the world. Despite his beginnings, he did not associate himself with religion for most of his life though he returned to an emphasis on spirituality in his later endeavors and writings. In the last decade of his adulthood, similar to the first decade, Carl was uniquely concerned with international peace efforts, facilitating conflict resolution in several hot spots of the world, including apartheid South Africa, war-torn Ireland, Central America, and behind the Iron Curtain, garnering a Nobel Peace Prize nomination upon his death.

Carl Rogers is best known for the foundation and development of the person-centered approach, most associated with humanistic psychotherapy, but that also initiated learner-centered and nondirective teaching and a host of interdisciplinary applications and sciences, ranging from game theory to medicine. He has been voted the most influential

American psychotherapist multiple times in large samples and is consistently considered one of the 10 most influential psychologists in history.

The person-centered approach has an explicitly developmental thrust. While there are nuances that make practice and a full understanding difficult to achieve, the theory is unusually parsimonious and simple to grasp. The sole motivational construct is the *actualizing tendency*, which posits that everyone is motivated toward maintenance and enhancement of their organism. Persons develop best when offered an environment of *empathy* and *unconditional positive regard* from *genuine* people. When failures in this environment occur, persons introject conditions of worth that causes a rift between their natural organismic valuing process and a need that develops for *self-actualization* and *self-consistency*.

This gap between actualization and self-actualization is described by the concept of *incongruence*. Suffering therefore is a result of this inner conflict and its original and ongoing relationships to connections or lack thereof that persons have with other people. It is a uniquely relational theory, even though it is frequently misunderstood as a particularly individualistic theory because of its assertion that facilitative relationships protect individuals' self-determination and agency.

People strive to become fully *functioning persons*, a concept that emphasizes the pro-social nature of people when given the opportunity to develop in facilitative relationships. People tend to become more open to their experience and trusting of their feelings and

perceptions, living existentially with more self-acceptance of their thrownness and integration between their beliefs and actions, greater appreciation for facts and greater creativity and generativity, and a more fulfilled and connected life. By demonstrating these qualities, persons develop presence that is in turn facilitative to those with whom they interact.

Further Reading

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