Psychotherapy and Politics International
Psychotherapy and Politics International, *12*(1), 4–17. (2014)
Published online 14 May 2014 in Wiley Online Library
(wileyonlinelibrary.com) **DOI:** 10.1002/ppi.1316

Psychotherapy is Political or it is not Psychotherapy: The Person-Centred Approach as an Essentially Political Venture

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ABSTRACT *Reflecting on the state of the art of person-centred therapy (PCT), and drawing upon the original understanding of politics as the consequence of an image of the human being, this article argues that a political understanding (as politics, policy, and polity) is essentially inherent in the person-centred approach. It discusses the policies of psychotherapeutic orientations and stresses the democratic and emancipatory stance of PCT. It concludes that we need a notification of dispute among the different approaches to the person in society and sketches a political way of being for therapists. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: politics; democracy; actualising tendency; personalisation; dialogue

> I consider it important, indeed necessary, for intellectual workers to come together, both to protect their own economic status and, also, generally speaking, to secure their influence in the political field. (Albert Einstein, 1938)

When we think about politics in the context of counselling and psychotherapy, to our mind come topics like the health service and the social security system in order to guarantee therapeutic supply for everybody; the dispute with the traditional medical model and conventional psychiatry in order to oppose a medico-centrism; the politics of the helping professions and their institutions in order to establish the professions and guarantee their influence. But there is a much more fundamental issue: the understanding of the person-centred approach (PCA) as a politically relevant approach in itself, an understanding that came up quite early in the history of the PCA.

This article argues that a reductionist understanding of politics does harm to the understanding of what it means to be a person-centred psychotherapist. An understanding that only takes one of the possible dimensions of *being* a political person and therefore fails to understand and practise psychotherapy as such as a political enterprise does not fully grasp the notion and impact of what it means to facilitate self-empowerment and community-building. From this it follows that to act according to an image of the human being means to act politically and vice versa.

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Firstly, the article looks at Rogers' explicit and implicit view of politics. Then it looks into the history of the notion and understanding of *politics*, showing that the original understanding of politics as the consequence of an image of the human being helps to understand the profound anthropological and ethical meaning of psychotherapy as politics in all its dimensions. The paper sheds light on the fact that a fully *personal* understanding brings to the fore that everybody is a politician whether they see themselves in this way or do not acknowledge this. From this it follows that to be a person-centred therapist means to be a politician – in the full meaning of the term *political* as policy, politics, and polity. The article gives some examples of what this means and enumerates some challenges and tasks. Einstein made his comment (quoted at the beginning of this article), when he joined the American Federation of Teachers (Local 552) as a charter member. Finally I argue for a plea for discourse and dispute among the different schools of therapy in respect to their political self-understanding and impact.

ROGERS, THE PCA, AND POLITICS

Carl Rogers' understanding of politics

For a long time, Carl Rogers had some hesitation in admitting the political dimension of his work. Richard Farson's (1974) designation of Rogers as a "*social revolutionary*" led Rogers in the late 1970s to become, in his own words, "a political person" (Rogers, 1977, p. 4). Rogers admitted that this late awareness was caused by the fact that the term *politics* had (then) only recently become relevant beyond the state level in the USA.

Rogers' understanding of politics was oriented towards power and control. Accordingly, "the politics of the PCA" to him was "a conscious renunciation and avoidance by the therapist of all control over, or decision-making for, the client". The focus is on the facilitation of "self-ownership", on the client's self-responsibility and on the strategies to achieve this goal. The locus of decision-making is "politically centered in the client" (ibid., p. 14). Rogers went on to reflect upon the threat for the therapists by losing power in the traditional sense of the word, when the power stays with the client. He critically dealt with other approaches, including the humanistic ones, demonstrating their inconsistency when they regard the therapist as an expert on the one hand and stress the self-responsibility of the client on the other hand – a critique currently relevant more than ever.

But there is much more: Rogers (1977) understood the theoretical foundations, even the image of the human being itself, as political. In talking about an organismic foundation of the actualising tendency, he regarded the *nature* of the human being itself as political. For Rogers the alienation of human beings from their constructive actualising tendency, from their nature, is the source of suffering. Therefore the attitudes and actions developed out of the image of the human being of the PCA are more than a therapeutic enterprise. Together with the epistemological implications and the underlying philosophy of science, this view represents a fundamental socio-political claim. Accordingly he regarded his work as a "quiet revolution" on the way to a "new political figure" (ibid., p. 254), to a "person of tomorrow" (Rogers, 1969).

He formulated six theses as the "politics of the helping professions":

1. A sensitive person, trying to be of help, becomes more person-centred, no matter what orientation she starts from, because she finds that approach more effective.
2. When you are focused on the person, diagnostic labels become largely irrelevant.

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3. The traditional medical model in psychotherapy is discovered to be largely in opposition to person-centredness.
4. It is found that those who can create an effective person-centred relationship do not necessarily come from the professionally trained group.
5. The more this person-centred approach is implemented and put into practice, the more it is found to challenge hierarchical models of "treatment" and hierarchical methods of organisation.
6. The very effectiveness of this unified person-centred approach constitutes a threat to professionals, administrators, and others, and steps are taken – consciously and unconsciously – to destroy it. It is too revolutionary (Rogers, 1977, p. 28).

Political awareness in the PCA

Throughout the history of the PCA we find authors who have been dealing with political questions. Politics plays a role for Anne Kearny (1996), Keith Tudor (1997, 2000), Christoph Fischer (2001), Peggy Natiello (2001), Gillian Proctor (2002), Kathida Chantler (2004), Mick Cooper (2006b), Maureen O'Hara (2007), Pete Sanders (2006), John Vasconcellos (2006), John K. Wood (2006) and other authors in Proctor, Cooper, Sanders, and Malcolm (2006). Feminist approaches, minority issues, gay and lesbian issues and others are prominently represented, for example, by Renata Fuchs (1999), Marietta Winkler (2002), Gillian Proctor and Mary Beth Napier (2004), Carol Wolter-Gustafson (2004), and others; a Special Issue of *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy* (Keys & Prüller-Jagenteufl, 2008) kept up and continued the matter; and an excellent overview and continuation can be found in the book by Proctor et al. (2006) in which, and following Rogers, Seamus Nash (2006), for instance, argued that there is "a political imperative inherent with the person-centred approach" (p. 29).

So, the subject – politics and the PCA – is well represented. However, the claim expressed in the title of this paper touches the foundations. An emancipatory psychotherapeutic approach that takes its foundational assumptions seriously must not only be aware of its political *implications*: understanding, investigating, formulating, developing them … it must also *be actively* political.

Of course, the image of the human being of the PCA influences the work in private practice and clinic, in training and supervision, in pedagogy, social and pastoral work, research, science, etc. Although nobody can deny or ignore this influence, the impact goes far beyond the political dimension of person-centred thinking and activities in the relatively comfortable, isolated setting in the closet of the practitioner and the ivory tower of the academic. The approach by its very nature is a socially critical and thus socio-political approach, a fundamental program for a *therapy* of the society, a psychotherapy and a *sociotherapy* (in the meaning of a therapy of and for society). The approach by its very nature is a program for radical societal transformation and thus (socio-)political change.

What does *political* mean?

The original understanding of politics as the consequence of an image of the human being

A look into the history of the word "politics" not only sheds light on the original understanding but also proves that the understanding of politics is a consequence of the understanding of the nature of the human being.

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The word *politics* derives from the Greek πολις [*polis*], the city-state. The polis originally denoted the castle of a city (e.g. the acropolis) and the settlement itself, later the city and finally the *autarkic* (i.e. self-sufficient) political unit – the city and the hinterland and the body of citizens. (The equivalent Latin word was *civitas.*) In the polis, law, culture, cult, military, education, entertainment and market were regulated by collective decisions. This provided a beneficial living together for the people inside the community and joint activity on the outside, and therefore identity and security. The political community intended to balance the autarky deficits of the individual.

Exactly according to this meaning Aristotle (384–322 BC) in his *Politika* (III, 6) understood the human being as a being oriented toward the polis, "a being relying on civic community by nature", as "ζωον πολιτικων" [*zoon politikon*], a social, political being that actively develops in the community. This means that the human being in the community – and only in it – can actualise their potential fully; that only in the community can they fully become humans. This community is the intellectual, cultural and legal frame, in which the human being lives and acts and strives toward self-realisation. Thus politics is the creation of an order that serves this goal.

It is not by chance that the definition of politics derives from the definition of the human being and vice versa. Politics is the consequence of an image of the human being, or the other way round: from a certain image of the human being follows inevitably political action. This finally means that *everybody is a politician.*

Greek philosophy already understood politics not only as the common public affairs, but also in a synthesis of politics and ethics, as the creation of a good political order, the *politeia*, and the realisation of the *bonum commune*, the public good – further developed in modern democracy theories.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding: this retrospective view on the Greeks is taken to provide a principled view on politics, not to speak of their way of living together as if that was a golden era or a perfect system. On the contrary, the rights were reserved to a small group of privileged people, they took slavery for granted, women for inferior, and found wars necessary and heroic, etc.

The classical understanding: Politics reduced to power issues

Political theories – from Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) onwards (with his doctrine of the clever use of power and the shrewd planning of the means to obtain and maintain power), including Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) to Max Weber (1864–1920) – altogether reduce politics to the art of gaining, distributing and preserving power and thus to a technique of ruling and statesmanship. All these theories, therefore, are subject to a reduced understanding of politics in which it is understood as deriving from power. Consequently, power becomes an end in itself. Max Weber's influential theory, according to which power means to exercise one's will also against resistance, allegedly free of any value judgment for reasons of philosophy of science, finally freed politics completely from the human person and made room for a so-called *political realism*.

Thus politics has become a matter (only) for politicians, something that cannot be a possibility or even a task for every individual – with fatal future consequences also for the politics of psychotherapy. Politics is regarded as the job of professional politicians and they act according to the just-mentioned understanding of power: they argue over power.

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THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF POLITICS

Political science is a young science, similar to psychotherapy science; its beginning lay in the nineteenth century. Like psychotherapy, politics understands itself as a discipline of practical philosophy.

Political science distinguishes between *policy* (the contents), *politics* (the process), and *polity* (the form).

Policy: The normative dimension

Policy denotes the *contents*: the different topics and their solutions to problems, including the political decisions. The matters to deal with are, particularly in pluralistic societies, different normative ideas, i.e. the tasks and goals of politics. In regard to a political party or a government, the term describes their goals and actions – different according to distinct ideas and systems of value and justice. These values are detectable from the economical side, i.e. what they want to spend money on.

Politics: The process dimension

Politics is about the *process* of the formulation of political demands and objectives and about the decision procedures, i.e. conflict-resolving and decision-making. Here, power and its enforcement within formal and informal rules play a decisive role, as do the selection of people in leadership functions, search for approval, and the coordination with other interests and demands.

Polity: The formal, institutional dimension

Polity deals with the *form*, the political orders and their structure of norms (e.g. constitutions, international agreements) and the institutions (e.g. parliaments). This includes distinct ideas about orders and the rules of a community such as the rule of law, separation of powers or guarantee of freedom and civil rights. Furthermore, the political culture with its typical patterns of order and behaviour belongs to polity. In most countries in the world, this is embodied in a *written* constitution, though some – Canada (apart from British Columbia), Israel, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, and the UK – have *unwritten* constitutions which are just as important than written ones.

To summarise: politics – as general term – is the realisation of policy with the help of politics based on polity (Rohe, 1994; Nuscheler, 1999; Pelinka, 2004; Patzelt, 2007).

PSYCHOTHERAPY AS POLITICS

What does this mean for psychotherapy and counselling? If it is true that politics is the consequence of an image of the human being, this means that to act according to an image of the human being means to act politically. Moreover, whoever reduces politics to the dimension of power issues implicitly demonstrates their values regarding the image of the human being.

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Psychotherapy is political as policy, politics and polity

You cannot be not political or act not politically. In each of the aforementioned meanings psychotherapy is political. It cannot be separated from policy, politics, and polity.

With regard to *policy* the question is, to which concept of values of a certain therapeutic orientation you subscribe: repair, adaptation, and skill training; or emancipation, autonomy and solidarity, freedom of choice, and responsibility. As mentioned above, according to Rogers, the concept of human nature with its actualising tendency is, itself, a political basis. For person-centred therapists this means to check what they do carefully and thoroughly whether it is in line with their assumptions of the self-directing disposition of the human being. Regarding *politics*, the question is about the procedures, the means with which these values are put into practice – in therapy and beyond it. From a person-centred standpoint this means in therapy to refrain from control over the client and from imposing one's will and goals; instead to experience empathy and acknowledgment and to encounter. Furthermore, beyond therapy, for the political discourse in society, a person-centred stance implies an attitude of facilitating the awareness for respecting the person-centred values. This happens in two ways: by understanding the views and values of others as well as confronting them by explicating one's own values and principles (e.g. through the formulation of political demands and objectives, engagement in working with media). This is what Rogers (1977) was talking about when he called his own way "a quiet revolution". With regard to *polity*, the task is to care about the framework, the formal and informal structural conditions, the institutions which we have to deal with and the institutions which we set up. This is about the health service, the therapy associations, the university institutes, international cooperation, worldwide associations, journals, etc.

Psychotherapy as politics therefore means:

- to realise the prevailing conditions, the established political culture (polity)
- in order to stand up for our image of the human being with its values (policy)
- in an appropriate and adequate way (politics)
- which aims at a change of the political culture (policy) (see also Sanders, 2006).

It goes without saying that policy, politics, and polity must be congruent, the means, procedures and institutions of which must go together with the basic principles and programs – although this obviously sometimes seems to be quite difficult to realise.

As mentioned before, in reality psychotherapy politics is much about polity and politics and not much about policy. Therefore, in what follows, I concentrate on the foundational principles.

The policies of psychotherapeutic orientations

Concerning these principles, when talking about the politics of psychotherapy we have to ask what the theoretical and practical consequences are of a certain psychotherapeutic orientation. Here it is definitely true that *psychotherapy* must be understood as a political activity or it fails as psychotherapy.

What today goes by the name of psychotherapy and counselling might include: adaptation; relaxation; (better or worse) advice giving; complex and highly efficient crisis management;

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optimally planned steering of behaviour in order to reach desired results managing of all kind with a strong affection for problems; diverse kinds of coaching such as "life management" and "problem coaching"; esoteric promise of salvation; solution-centred and self-surpassing inventing of techniques; sophisticated, self-enthusiastic and self-overrating analysing and explaining of the world; wittily formulated tele-diagnoses and television analyses, as well as less witty image cultivation or better showmanship and pseudo-elucidation of the public by prominent faces – you can find any form of "care" in any situations from procreation to burial.

All these activities carry certain political implications and are based on certain values. They are different forms of social engineering or social control – but all these do not deserve to be called psychotherapy, if this word is connected with personality development in an emancipatory meaning.

One may object that psychotherapy and politics are basically two different levels of discourse that must not be mixed up: psychotherapy is about understanding and politics is about change – "My job is to be a therapist, to listen and understand; others should care about politics!" However, as a matter of fact, both therapy and politics are about understanding *and* change. On the basis of a personal attitude a split of these would be fatal. The person-centred position that understanding means changing, that change comes about by understanding hits the point: both are about *en-counter*, that is, being together and being counter. To understand certainly does not mean to agree, and to change does not mean to devalue or belittle the other's position.

The obvious consequence is conflict and dispute. The consequence is a clash of opinions; to deliberately get into an argument. The statement that psychotherapy is unavoidably political intends to state the necessity of bringing into the societal discourse what we have learned in and from therapy, loudly, clearly, and unmistakably.

Therefore dispute is necessary. This will be a dispute between two basically different paradigms. This will be a political discourse – a discourse primarily about the understanding of politics as such, i.e. the prevailing present-day understanding of everyday life on the one hand; the ruling doctrine, the doctrine of the ruling, of those in power, on the other hand. Of course, this will need a culture of dispute – where, for quite a lot of person-centred people, there is definitely a need to catch up.

Spheres of discourse regarding policy in society from a person-centred stance

Thus psychotherapy always means to engage in the discourse of policy and to raise one's voice clearly and unambiguously where psychotherapists and counsellors have to play a role and have something to contribute. Based on earlier writings about basic terms (referenced below), it can be proved that all person-centred core terms are highly politically relevant. Here are a few keywords which, of course, need careful consideration, in order that they are not used as meaningless catchphrases.

- If we come from a *substantial-relational dialectics* – as it is inherent in the understanding of what it means to regard the human being as a *person*, a term that equally comprises independence and interconnectedness (see Schmid, 1994, 1998a, 2007, 2009 – then it is clear that the facilitation of autonomy and of successful relationships is of prime and fundamental importance for human beings. This is a political task. To Rogers (1977) estrangement was *the* basic pattern of all psychological pathology. This means that the danger of alienation is to be found in any place where the human being is not aware of their

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personhood in all its dimensions. Thus the furthering of authenticity, both as consciousness and as congruence and genuineness in relationships, is indeed a political task (Fischer, 2001; Schmid, 2001).

- If we are convinced that the understanding of psychotherapy as the art of *encounter* (see Rogers, 1962; Schmid, 1994, 1998b, 2006, 2008a; Barrett-Lennard, 2005; Mearns & Cooper, 2005) leads to viewing psychotherapy as a *Thou–I relationship* (Schmid, 2006) and that the essence of being human is *dialogue*, that dialogue is the basis for the appearance and unfolding of the original sociality of the human being (Levinas, 1989), and that the person *is* dialogue from the very beginning and that the PCA unveils the dialogical quality already there (see Cooper, 2006a, 2007; Schmid, 2006, 2007, 2008b), then the dialogical situation has to be taken seriously above all else, both in the therapeutic setting and beyond the therapy room. Consequently, it is a task of prime importance in all areas of social life to foster and demand situations where dialogue can occur, or – to be precise – cannot be suppressed. This is a political task.
- If we are convinced that the person-centred concept of *empowerment* (not in the fashionable use of it that means everything and nothing) is a political program par excellence, and that it is central to the personality development of each individual, then we need to bring spontaneity and creativity into all areas of life (Schmid, 1996a). Spontaneity and creativity are a radical change of power per se (Sainer, 1975): spontaneous and creative people are much more immune to dependency.
- If we come from the conviction that the epistemological and therapeutic change of paradigms *from analysing and diagnosing to co-creating* is the foundation on which to keep and to confirm the dignity of our fellow human beings, then the fostering of participation and self-determination is a political program and not only a therapeutic way to proceed, let alone a method. As a consequence, it is necessary to form a counter-public, a counter-awareness against falling for diagnoses or the fetishism of natural science and empiricism. Here we also have to enter the (political) discourse and argue about the matter within the person-centred and experiential "family" or "nation", namely which goals, implicit and explicit ones, our orientation shall pursue.
- If we are aware that the PCA is *social* psychology by its very nature and therefore convinced that life springs *not from the Self but from the primary We* (see Schmid, 2002b, 2003; Schmid & Mearns, 2006), then values like tolerance, solidarity, justice, and support of and for minorities and discriminated people are not a consequence but a foundation and must be demanded. It goes without saying that this is a political task that requires the courage of one's convictions.
- If we assert that *the group is the primary place*, where people learn how to live life, where problems originate and also can be dealt with and solved (see Schmid, 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Schmid & O'Hara, 2007), then the setting up and facilitation of appropriate groups, characterised by self-steering, self-responsibility and self-help, is a political task.
- If we know that, according to our experiences in encounter groups and large groups, *self-determined group processes* constitute an incredible potential for development, and that guidance, leadership and management is a function and task of the group and not a job of the "strong man or woman", then we have experience and knowledge from which the facilitation of democracy and its development can benefit highly – a political task of prime importance.

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- If we value the nature of the asymmetricity of a Thou–I relationship and thus the importance of taking the other as truly an *Other*, if we thus understand our profession as *practical social ethics* (see Schmid, 1994, 1996b, 2003), then it is a political task to raise our voice for all who, at best, speak in our practices, if at all they find their way to the therapy room: minorities, discriminated people, ignored, laughed at, underprivileged. It is not by coincidence that feminists, and gay and lesbian people, to name only two groups in our culture, and politically suppressed people all over the world, discovered the PCA rightly as an approach that allows them to express themselves.
- Finally, if the human being's *actualising tendency* is not simply an inner force of the individual, but essentially a relationship-oriented and social construct and therefore a *personalising tendency*, characterised by freedom and creativity (Schmid, 1994, 2008a) and fostered by the *presence* of the Other (Schmid, 2002a), then we are obliged to interfere in structures and institutions that are hindering instead of creatively fostering personalisation. Instead of remaining in "noble" silence psychotherapists and counsellors must bring the program of becoming a person, of creative personalisation, into the societal discourse much more forcefully.

To summarise: if psychotherapy understands itself in this way, then psychotherapists and counsellors have an ethical duty to act politically. It is a question of the conception of oneself, of self-esteem and responsibility to understand oneself in these professions as a political being and to act accordingly.

NOTIFICATION OF DISPUTE

If we take this sketch of a comprehension of psychotherapy on the basis of its image of the human being serious, then neither more nor less than the dispute between, on the one hand, remaining dependent to authorities (and, ultimately, totalitarianism), and, on the other hand, democracy is at stake: between indoctrination and emancipation, between either dominance, misuse of power and control or participation and sharing. To render it in person-centred terms: it is the dispute between the patient and the person.

It does not come as a surprise that practitioners and theoreticians in many countries and workgroups plead for debate and against adaptation and a system-stabilising role of psychotherapy and counselling (see, for example, the Conference "Psychotherapy and Politics: Realising the Potential", in Glasgow in 2009; Fischer, 2001; Proctor et al., 2006). In the light of the present development of the health politics, more and more therapists are convinced that it is definitely the *kairos* (appropriate time or the very moment) for a notification of dispute. The quiet revolution sometimes and in some ways has been too quiet. Therapists refer to the development in Germany, for example, where adaptation and compromise have led to the denial of recognition of PCT by social security authorities. They refer to Rogers, who, admittedly under different circumstances, tried harder: he, the psychologist, made it to become professor in both psychology and psychiatry departments in Wisconsin. They refer to his horror vision (Rogers, 1977) that we will have to give up freedom in order to survive – a threat that in an era of counter-measures against terrorism seems to be more relevant than ever.

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For a "political way of being" we need:

- to understand that the classical three dimensions of being in therapy – i.e. to empathise, to acknowledge unconditionally, and to respond authentically – imply the classical three *political* steps: to observe, to form an opinion, to act accordingly;
- political education;
- social criticism as an indispensable part of psychotherapeutic theory development, practice, and training;
- media policy as an obligatory part of psychotherapeutic theory development, practice, and training.

This requires:

- us to leave the closet of the own private practice and the study and to engage politically – therapists need to publicly, politically voice and fight for what they know out of their experience with clients;
- cooperation with other orientations that pursue similar goals and an open, critical discussion with all those who support the status quo;
- cooperation with other disciplines and professions;
- steadfastness – if the goals are personalisation and dialogue, there must be no compromise with regard to the essential issues.

What the PCA has to offer is the recovery of conviction in relationship – a necessary prerequisite for democracy – the excavation of the foundational dialogical situation, the trust in the creativity of personalisation.

All this can be summarised in one simple sentence: each psychotherapist and counsellor faces the political challenge to take sides – which can happen in many, very different ways. However, it does not happen if they do not speak up, start to write and connect to the World Wide Web. We need to raise our voices when the milieu is shaped in which our clients live, which promotes and furthers their life and our own life, or damages and destroys it. We need to oppose any kind of therapy that repairs the individual and does not think of changing or destroying what destroys the *human* beings. We need to come out of the therapy room and promote the consequences of what we experience in the therapies in public.

Discourse among the therapeutic schools or modalities

This also means taking a stand in the therapeutic discourse between schools, modalities or therapeutic orientations. To develop one's own identity involves the development of a political identity – which makes it necessary to take a stand and not to shrink from debate and not to place one's hopes in ignoring or sealing oneself off or believe in "anything goes".

The widespread ignorance of the position of the PCA must also be seen as a phenomenon of resistance, both in the course of the further development of the therapeutic schools – which, in the meantime, all more or less emphasise the importance of relationship and celebrate the rediscovery of the person (without caring for referencing the pioneers, Rogers and the PCA), and watering down and playing down the radical positions of the PCA by those

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branches within the PCE therapies that tend to give up the core values and dissolve into a general psychology. That others copy, even imitate, and follow the PCA in many aspects may cost us a smile or make us annoyed. The background is not humorous, ridiculous or annoying at all: the PCA *is* a threat for all therapists who subscribe to a traditional understanding of power, an understanding following Weber's definition. Rogers clearly recognised this (see Rogers, 1977). The destruction he talked about can also happen through self-deprecation, or undervaluing ourselves.

CONCLUSION: THE MOST PERSONAL IS THE MOST POLITICAL

A psychotherapist or counsellor who does not care about politics in fact does harm to their clients. To be apolitical means to stabilise, to fortify the status quo. If psychotherapists do not raise their voices in society, they do not take themselves or their clients seriously. They contribute to cement in, or reinforce, the current circumstances.

Neither more nor less than the political culture of psychotherapists and counsellors is at stake. Doing psychotherapy and at the same time being politically disengaged or claiming to be non-political is not only cowardice, it is also and simply irresponsible.

Like maybe no other psychotherapeutic orientation, the PCA's image of the human being includes a political program, and the approach itself claims to be political. Thus it challenges the community of psychotherapists and counsellors altogether.

To summarise: unconditional positive regard definitely has a political dimension. This kind of love – in the meaning that is clearly defined in the PCA (see Rogers, 1951; Schmid, 1996a, 1996b) – is a political force. It challenges structures and hierarchies, and breaks up suppression, totalitarianism, self-satisfaction, contentment, narcissism, and idleness. It opens up authenticity, transparency, sincerity, unpredictability, desire to change, free discourse, and reliability.

Personalisation is necessarily also a political process and, therefore, a political program. It was the message of the early feminist movement that the personal is political. The actualising tendency as a personalising tendency is, necessarily, also a political tendency, a tendency to become a political being. Rogers (1961) wrote that "*the most personal is the most universal*" (p. 26) – and, we need to add: *is the most political.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is based on keynotes given at a symposium of the Austrian Institute for Person-Centered Studies, Vienna, April 2007, and the 3rd Annual Conference of the British Association for the Person-Centred Approach, Cirencester, UK, September 2007. It was originally published in *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*, *11*(2), 95–108 and is reproduced with permission by the author. The author wishes to thank Mick Cooper and three reviewers for their help with the original paper.

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DOI: 10.1002/ppi