

## Editorial

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In September 2007 I had the good fortune to hear Peter Schmid, an Austrian person-centred colleague, deliver a keynote speech to the 3rd Annual Conference of the British Association for the Person-Centred Approach with the title: “Psychotherapy is Political or it is not Psychotherapy”. Amongst the number of disciplines of which Peter is a master, philosophy is one, and, as someone with a background in philosophy, I particularly appreciated his philosophical approach to politics, and the link he made between the origins of the word and the Greek concept – and practice – of the polis, and Aristotle’s argument that “man” is a social and, therefore, a political animal or being. There were – and are – many other elements to Peter’s argument and I remember being impressed by his logic, admiring his breadth and depth of knowledge, relieved that someone was making these arguments and connections, appreciative of his lively presentation – and leading the standing ovation that followed the conclusion of his presentation.

A few years later, in 2012, Peter published the article based on this keynote speech in the journal *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies* (Volume 11, No. 2, pp. 95–108). I was able to re-read it and, again, appreciate the scope and layers of his argument, as well as identify more clearly some areas of difference and disagreement. By then I was editing this journal and thought it would be a good idea if we could reproduce that article, together with some discussant papers and, two years later, this special themed issue is the result. Once we had obtained permission to reproduce the article, I sent it to a number of colleagues, inviting them to write their responses to it. In selecting colleagues to be discussants, I was keen to reflect both the internationalism of the journal – the final contributors come from Aotearoa New Zealand, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, and the United Kingdom – and a theoretical diversity – from the person-centred approach to Lacanian psychoanalysis – as well as different professional identities – psychotherapy, psychology, and counselling. In addition to the usual peer review process, and in order to give some consistency across the contributions to the issue, I also engaged one peer reviewer who read, evaluated and commented on all the articles and I am particularly grateful to him for this reading and his support. He knows who he is and I will acknowledge him in the usual way in the last issue of the journal at the end of the year.

In this special issue on the title of Peter’s paper – “Psychotherapy is Political or it is not Psychotherapy”, we reproduce the original article, which Peter has only slightly revised, mainly updating some references and for this journal’s house style; and I thank him as well as the journal *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies* (published by Routledge) for their permission to reproduce it. This is followed by five invited discussant articles, each

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of which responds to Peter's article in very different ways, picking up on different aspects of Peter's arguments and their implications, and in different forms and tones. In my original invitation to colleagues, I had used the phrase "discussant paper" but, when asked to clarify this, I also used words like "response", "take" (as is "your take on the paper"), and "riff" (as in the musical riff, a series of repeated notes, patterns, or phrases that take the listener or reader to another place). As a result, the form and tone of the articles are very different and range from the analytic (Pavón Cuéllar and Hayes), through the more extemporaneous and riff-like (Woodard and Chaplin), to the note-like (Muramoto). In order to facilitate the reader's reading of the issue as whole, when the discussants have quoted from Peter's paper, I have ensured that the page numbers refer to Peter's article *in this current issue* (not his original paper).

In his paper, which he introduces with a brief discussion of Carl Rogers' understanding of politics, and the political awareness in and applications of the person-centred approach, Peter takes us back to the origins of the word "politics" from the Greek word *πόλις* (*polis*), which referred to the city state, and from that, Aristotle's view of human beings as political beings, that is, oriented towards the polis or the political. He then identifies three dimensions of politics: policy, politics (as in process), and polity, and elaborates these in terms of psychotherapy. He then gives a "notification of dispute", that is, as he describes it, the dispute between the dependent and indoctrinated "patient" and the emancipated person. This is a rich and challenging article which deserves the detailed attention it has received from the five discussants who have contributed to this issue.

In the first of the discussant articles, David Pavón Cuéllar, one of the journal's associate editors, writing from a particular theoretical-political articulation between Freudianism and Marxism, first offers his thoughts about Lacan and politics, and articulates a Lacanian *Marxist* politics, with the emphasis on Marx. He uses this as the basis on which to identify first, seven political *agreements* between psychoanalysis and the person-centred approach in psychotherapy – centring on reductionism, the personal being political, therapy as a political activity, their common critical stance, the necessity of dispute, their opposition to what he refers to as "scientific-empiricist fetishism", and their renunciation of control and indoctrination – and secondly, four political *disagreements* between psychoanalysis and the person-centred approach – namely those regarding humanism, selfism, empathism, and therapism. David's article is a clear, thorough, wide-ranging and well-informed analysis of Peter's original article.

Next, Grahame Hayes takes issue with what he refers to as an "over-determination of the political" in Peter's article, and, especially, his (Peter's) all-encompassing view of politics. Grahame argues that it is (more) useful to conceptualise the realms of the political and the psychotherapeutic as relatively autonomous from each other (than to put them together). Drawing on the work of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, and the American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler and, specifically her social theory of vulnerability, Grahame advances a concept of the political that, as he puts it is "beyond" that proposed by Schmid. As to the relative merits of their concepts of politics, you, the reader, will, no doubt, decide.

In his article, Wiremu Woodard, who refers to himself as "an Indigenous emerging therapist", takes a couple of points from Peter's article – regarding the failure of psychotherapy, and the significance of the dominant political image of the human being – and elaborates them in the context the development of psychotherapy in Aotearoa New Zealand (which, in itself, is, of course, a political term, as it speaks – in two languages – of two descriptions of the same geographical/political land mass). In his response, Wiremu refers to the 1907 *Tohunga*

*Suppression Act*, which outlawed indigenous healing and health care in New Zealand (sic) and links the ideology that informed that Act with the more recent *Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003*, under which psychotherapists are registered and which, in effect, outlaws anyone other than state-registered psychotherapists from claiming that title (see Morice & Woodard, 2011; Tudor, 2011). He ends by describing the “electric” atmosphere of two recent conferences of the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists at which invited Māori tohunga conducted healing sessions, which not only offered healing to the delegates attending those conferences but also represented an implicit challenge to traditional Western concepts and definitions of “psychotherapy” and its legitimation through statutory regulation – which is especially interesting when we consider that psychotherapy – ψυχή (psyche) + Θεραπεία (therapia) – translates as “soul healing”.

In her article, Jocelyn Chaplin takes some of the “notes” from Peter’s articles and plays with them. In doing so, she argues first, that the psychotherapy Schmid refers to is too specific, and, secondly, that the politics he refers to is not specific enough; thirdly, that the person-centred approach is no more “political” than other theoretical approaches or therapeutic modalities, and, fourthly, that, if there is to be a dialogue between approaches or modalities, then there needs to be more emphasis on the common ground between them. In doing so, she encompasses discussions and references to community, human nature, Reich, equality, the Occupy movement, the political psyche (Samuels, 1993), hierarchies, and the authentic.

In the last discussant paper, Kuniko Muramoto makes or strikes four notes on Schmid’s article by taking his three dimensions of politics (policy, politics/process, and polity) and adding a fourth, that is, that the personal is political. She uses these four dimensions to discuss the definition of psychotherapy; the encounter group and movement as a politics of psychotherapy; the World Association for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy; as well as some of her own experiences as a female psychotherapist in Japan.

In the final article of the issue, and having had the opportunity to read the discussant papers prior to publication, Peter Schmid offers a brief response to what he considers some of the main points raised in them.

Although this particular special, themed issue is finite, I do hope that the discussion contained herein will continue, and very much welcome further submissions on this theme. It seems to me that both Peter’s paper and the discussants’ responses to it speak to the heart of the project that is *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, that is, that there is a politics of and to psychotherapy, as there is a psychotherapeutic analysis and/or understanding of the social/political world. Just as the struggle continues – la lotta contiuna, ka whawhai tonu matou – all over the world, let us ensure that the discussion – and the activity – of political psychotherapy, and psychotherapeutic politics continue.

## REFERENCES

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