

6th PCE World Conference

Egmond aan Zee

Keynote Presenters' Closing Panel Session

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Comment

I am convinced that we, the keynote presenters, are in accordance

- inasmuch as each of us is committed to offer the best to the clients he knows of and has and that our work is dedicated towards striving for development of theory and practice.

I am sure that we differ considerably in philosophy, theory and practice.

I do not think we only use different languages or ways to describe our work and understanding. We actually think about and do therapy in different ways. As far as I am concerned I see profound differences with you, Les Greenberg, particularly regarding the issue of self-determination of the process of therapy rooting in a diverse image of the human being. And I am sure that the fact that finally you, Rainer Sachse, clearly and literally came to say goodbye to CCT, as you write in your latest book (Sachse, 2003, p.14), and to choose a different name for your way of doing and understanding therapy – ‘clarification-oriented therapy’ – shows that you yourself feel that there are two approaches which are quite far away from each other.

I understand that many people wish this disagreement and conflict would not exist.

But it does and I am not concerned about that. I regard it as a challenge to further develop our respective stances – on all levels: theoretically, practically, personally. These differences are not on the surface only, they reach deeply in our self-understanding as humans, both

personally and professionally – unfortunately all male humans, which excludes half of the world from the start (by the way the only significant mistake I found in this so well prepared, designed and organized conference for which I want to express my heartfelt thanks and respect to the organizers to make such a stimulating event happen).

What is this conflict about?

It is – in my view – the conflict between different epistemologies, opinions on science and approaches to life – in a word: between paradigms. It is not a conflict about the question whether PCT needs to be further developed or not; I am sure that nobody who wants to be taken seriously, would think there is nothing to say beyond Carl Rogers. And particularly as a person who finds it most valuable to push the intention of Rogers forward, I together with many other colleagues do not at all feel understood, if we are seen as doing ‘nothing but’ repeating Rogers or doing ‘nothing but offering a relationship’. The same applies, if we hear that something has to be added to so called classical PCT – ongoing change is needed, undoubtedly, but what would you *add* to the very best you do in offering yourself as a person in a most professional and responsible way? And concerning empirical research: It goes without saying that it is important and necessary, not only because others compel us to it, but out of our own understanding: that theory has to be as close to experience as possible – however, it must be a kind of research which is grounded in our humanistic principles.

How to deal with this conflict?

We should not get intimidated by the exponents of a fashion-oriented inhuman psychology dominated by self-selected experts even if it is mainstream today.

Is it really the case that the human being can be understood by exclusively employing the methods of natural science? Does such an extremely reductionistic view meet the human being at all? Isn't it highly naïve to think that the essence of life, or at least to live more

satisfactorily or with less suffering can be discovered by a simple collection of empirical figures and studies using simple symptom outcome measures?

Has psychology nothing to offer but a list of papers and books containing *my* and my colleagues' conclusions of *our* empirical research and you either eat it or you find yourself in the role of an old-fashioned and out-dated development- and relationship-oriented therapist as opposed to an alleged state-of-the-art-expert? What about all the studies – masses of literature can be found – that, instead of marginalizing it, proof the cruciality of relationship for therapy? What about the good qualitative data on PCT?

What is psychotherapy about at all? To offer the most effective form (which might also be compulsion, pressure, force – why not, if it's effective?) or to offer the most human form?

Does so called empirical evidence not have to unveil its methodology? Do scientists not have to reveal their image of the human being? Do they not need to discuss their basic beliefs and their values with others? Do such 'experts' not need to disclose their prior assumptions in both natural science and psychotherapy research? what they understand by change, for instance? Is it really the state of the art not to explain how to interpret one's data and not even to disclose one's intentions, objectives and goals in therapy? Is this science and honest research – which means 'search'! – or scientism?

Which philosophy of science underpins this? What kind of ethics of science informs such procedure? Isn't it an ideological stance to reproach others for being ideological without dialogue about the others' intention, understanding and theories?

Who is the infallible pope of the true church of science dogmatically declaring who belongs to a sect (to use Rainer Sachse's description)? What legitimacy do disciples of the 150 year old paradigm of positivism have to devalue the 50 year old psychology of Carl Rogers? Could it be that this is not at all outdated, but that his revolutionary view of the human being as a person is not yet sounded out by far? There must be great power in an approach when critics feel compelled to invalidate and discredit it so fiercely and furiously.

But we should not simply reject such reproach and face the debate with the mainstream of today's academic psychology. It must be seen as a challenge for conceptual development. We should not retreat and not conform, to come back to Dave Mearns's alternative. We have to deal with this seriously. Otherwise we might find ourselves in a world regulated by experts who know better what is good for a person than the persons themselves. And then it would only be logical to compel this person to achieve his/her best. Sometimes what is proposed in the name of science seems not far away from that.

Why do we have this conflict?

I agree with Les Greenberg that we all regard the client-therapist-relationship as something extremely precious and we have been working hard for the development of our respective theories about it. So, the persons deserve all respect; theories deserve no respect – they always need to be attacked and criticized, in order to be further developed. This is what scientific progress is about: Fight theories, but respect persons!

How to proceed?

I think it became obvious how important it is to really listen to each other and overcome prejudices. I found it amazing, how different we use words and terms; this became literally visible, for example, when we talked about “presence only” (in the meaning of relationship blabla) and “only presence” (in the meaning of a most valuable way of *being* as a concrete basis for *doing*) or about the different understandings of science. In reaching such a basis where we really listen to each other I consider it to be crucial to find a communication on the same level: the praxeological level, the methodological level, the different levels of theory building and the metatheoretical, existential level of the basic beliefs.

It is crucial to dialogue with those willing to dialogue and to further work on the paradigms. I find no use attacking and depreciating people that think and act differently, even if they

choose to do so. We need to live with the differences and to stand the present tension instead of denying it or watering it down. I see it as a fertile conflict. If we use it to reconsider our convictions and to further develop them, I regard it as a kairos (Schmid, 2003), a fruitful opportunity, and the source of our future strength.

I am convinced that the World Association and its Journal is the best place available for such ongoing dialogue which I am looking forward to curiously and optimistically.

References

Sachse, R. (2003). *Klärungsorientierte Psychotherapie*. Göttingen: Hogrefe.

Schmid, P.F. (2003). The characteristics of a person-centered approach to therapy and counseling: Criteria for identity and coherence. *PCEP*, 2, 2.