



Jung, Ecopsychology, and the Person-Centered Approach: Seeking Wholeness in Counseling, Life Coaching, and Clinical Spiritual Care

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Abstract

Everyone who does spiritual care, counseling, or life coaching for a living should have a theory; we are taught this early on and build on that central premise of our career journey even as we change and grow with time and experience. Many of us choose our training programs and mentors based on early theoretical assumptions. Hopefully, with experience and good peer supervision, we remain open to new learning even if it does not match our early theories.

As this essay will show, I have been most influenced by gentle grandfather figures, perhaps because I never had one. The central thinking that I wish to present as my personal theory, tested with nearly 40 years of health care experience, is my basic trust for other persons. I trust that there is a constructive directional flow toward the realization of each person's full potential. I trust that this flow works with, and not against, their temperament and experience. I trust that individuals and groups can set their own goals and monitor their progress toward these goals. I experience this abiding trust because I experience the universe, as articulated in the creation centered traditions, as having complete trust in the cycles of creation.

Introduction

Everyone who does spiritual care, counseling, or life coaching for a living should have a theory; we are taught this early on and build on that central premise of our career journey even as we change and grow with time and experience. Many of us choose our training programs and mentors based on early theoretical assumptions. Hopefully, with experience and good peer supervision, we remain open to new learning even if it does not match our early theories.

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My theories are humanistic and informed most strongly by Carl Rogers. I apply his central theory of personality to my journey with clients; that is, what will determine effectiveness are the client's own motivation and the presence of a counselor/mentor/friend who can offer acceptance, respect, warmth, empathy, and genuineness. I am also informed by Jung's work in the area of personality types, and the temperament theories brought to the fore by the partnerships of Myers-Briggs and Keirsey-Bates. It is through the use of temperament theory that I evaluate and assess learning and healing preferences. Finally, I am convinced by the new and exciting work in the field of ecopsychology that in the study of "living human documents", and the inner learning that results, one cannot disconnect oneself from the environment and planet, which surrounds and nurtures us.

This world-view evolves, as it did for Rogers, out of "the soil of my own experience".^[i] That experience includes my combined religious heritage of renegade Anglo-Catholicism and Unitarian Universalism/humanism. Indeed, the deepest religious principles of Unitarian Universalism speak to this world-view directly. The opening words of our religious principles covenant call us to "affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; a free and responsible search for truth and meaning; the primacy of conscience; the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; and a respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part".^[ii] This mingles with my catholic, Thomazine Christianity, which finds divinity in all things.^[iii] The

Gospel of Thomas often places an emphasis here, as in saying 77: "Jesus said, I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained. Split a piece of wood, I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there."[iv]

Of course, my experience is made up of much more than my religious heritage, and has been every bit as paradoxical. As a youngster, I was exposed to a frightening array of emotional and physical abuse at the hands of my brothers and mother. Yet, those who would be my surrogate siblings and surrogate parents always found their way to me, ready to gift me with their unconditional love. In my early twenties, my life careened out of control and I found myself filled with feelings of shame and humiliation and darkness and terror. Yet, many hands were extended to me to keep me safe, help me up, and support me as I healed. Even as I came out as a gay man, those voices of hope and support materialized to give me strength. I cannot put words to my deepest feelings of trust and gratitude to the cycles of life and to the people who have entered my life right when I needed them. My theory, then, is a way for me to verbalize this trust, and to understand it better for myself.

The Person Centered Approach

The person-centered approach is a way of helping individuals and groups in conflict as well as with their own personal growth needs. Its essentials were formulated by psychologist Carl R. Rogers as early as 1940. He stated his theory clearly, and he introduced verbatim transcriptions of his work as well as stimulated a vast amount of research, both previously unknown to the clinical psychology community. His hypothesis was revolutionary: that a self-directed growth process would follow the facilitation and acceptance of a particular kind of relationship, which was characterized by genuineness, non-judgemental caring, and empathy. This hypothesis has been tested over decades in situations involving teachers and students, administrators and staff, facilitators and participants in cross-cultural groups, as well as psychotherapists and clients.

In her 1995 article written for the journal *AHP Perspective*, Maureen O'Hara talks about how two different groups of behaviorist researchers had come to a similar conclusion, namely, that "while the number of therapy models has proliferated, mushrooming from 60 to more than 400 since the mid-1960s, 30 years of clinical outcome research has not found any one

theory, model, method, or package of techniques to be reliably better than any other". She goes on to say that the conclusion both groups of researchers came to was that "what actually creates growth and change is the person's own motivation and the presence of a counselor who can offer acceptance, respect, warmth, empathy, and genuineness."[i]

This is exactly how I define the task of companionship with clients. I journey alongside the client or student, and my attempt in both individual and group settings is to create a safe, inclusive space where several things can happen:

1. Where they are free to determine their own goals and agenda for our time together and free to describe their own subjective experience in their own way.
2. Where I am a co-explorer with them, demonstrating my faith in them, listening as empathically and accurately as I can for the deeper meanings of their expressions, and dealing with them honestly and without roles or manipulative games.
3. Where we all share a relationship that is as egalitarian as possible, without any power-over authoritarian posture. It seems especially important for me to avoid labels and diagnosis, and concentrate on genuineness.

Later in his life, Rogers articulated what most would describe as his "personality theory", having spent many years critical of such theories. Based upon what he called the "core tendency" (to actualize one's inherent potentialities), he fashioned a 19-point "theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships". It is interesting that Matthew Fox, in his book "The Reinvention of Work", points out that, akin to Rogers' work of so many years ago, many people trained in a secular and even mechanical approaches to the psyche are feeling called to practice counseling and therapy as something akin to spiritual direction. They are moving from a fall-redemption model that begins by asking, "What is your problem?" to a creation-centered spiritual direction that begins with the question "What is your divine grace and how can it be better freed to express itself?"

Other personality theories offer different windows through which we can view Rogers' thinking, especially Jung's "individuation" and the work of Viktor Frankl. For Jung, the movement toward wholeness, or "individuation", came about through the integration of the conscious and unconscious parts of the personality. Jung brings a significant spiritual dimension to his theories in the form of the collective unconscious, archetypes, and myths. The goal of living, for Jung, is "individuation", or knowing oneself as fully as possible. He saw the first half of life as

practicing for this peak state. In the second half, a person moves through a process of integration and completion of one's self, or "self-realization". Viktor Frankl disagreed with the drive theories which came before him, and asserted that the drive or will which controls all human choices is the will to "meaning".

Jung

Working with each student's natural tendency to move toward their full potential, I believe they bring their own temperament, probably inborn and genetic. Even though the idea that everyone is alike has been powerfully evident in our culture, in 1920 Carl Jung disagreed. He said that people are different in fundamental ways even though they all have the same multitude of instincts (or archetypes) to drive them from within. One instinct is no more important than the other. What is important is our preference for how we function. Our preference for a given function is characteristic, and so we may be typed by this preference. Thus Jung invented the "function types" or "psychological types".

Jung's thinking on personality type was never really very popular, even though other psychologists such as Adler and Kretschmer had espoused similar theories. As early as 1930, other psychological schools were explaining behavior as due to only unconscious motives or past experience, or both. In the 1950s, Isabel Myers and her mother Katheryn Briggs "dusted off" a copy of Jung's book on psychological types and developed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which became widely used and popularized the notion of psychological types. David Keirse and Marilyn Bates made this theory even more popular and accessible with their 1979 book "Please Understand Me". In this work, they take Jung's theories even further (developing "temperament theory") and describe four areas where persons can be typed, totaling 32 mixed types (since some of the four areas can score evenly). Those four areas are extroversion vs introversion, intuition vs sensation, thinking vs feeling, and judging vs perceiving. There is an easily-accessible wealth of information available about temperament theory, so I will limit my discussion of it here.

For my own theory, this notion of inborn temperament is real to me in my own experience and my experience of others, and its gentle, inclusive humanity seems a natural fit with Roger's work. Others have pointed out how helpful type theory is in understanding how the client or student takes in information, processes it and makes judgments about it. It also allows those doing counseling or supervision to understand the client's

preferred method of learning and allows the client to conceptualize his or her way of being with and relating to others. To quote David Keirse, ***"suppose it is so that people differ in temperament and that therefore their behavior is just as inborn as their body build. Then we do violence to others when we assume such differences to be flaws and afflictions. To each his own, different strokes for different folks. To achieve the intent of these sayings will take a lot of work in coming to see our differences as something other than flaws."*** To be able to help others understand their own temperament seems a wonderful gift for spiritual care and counseling, and a tool for understanding personal and interpersonal dynamics openly and honestly.

Ecopsychology

As I stated in my introduction, I cannot imagine theological education and the study of "living human documents" at the turn of the millennium without looking at our individual and collective relationships with nature and our planet. Theories of personality don't seem enough; how can I talk about self learning and the theology needed to form pastoral identity without bringing in such an important part of my own experience? Ecopsychology was the answer.

To quote Swimme and Berry, "the human professions all need to recognize their prototype and their primary resource in the integral functioning of the Earth community. The natural world itself is the primary economic reality, the primary educator, the primary governance, the primary technologist, the primary healer, the primary presence of the sacred, the primary moral value." In his exciting new book called "Ecotherapy", pastoral counselor and Claremont School of Theology professor Howard Clinebell speaks directly to this as well as the need for incorporating eco-education into pastoral identity. His argument is that counselors, psychotherapists, health professionals, teachers, clergy, and parents share a common concern for developing whole persons and enhancing "the good life" (similar to Roger's notion of the "fully functioning person"). ***"Any definition of the good life that makes sense in our world must include protecting the good earth on which our wellness depends."***

For me, the exploration of my relationship to nature is an integral part of my personal spiritual and psychological growth. Since my very youngest days, I have found spiritual peace, serenity, and the presence of divinity in nature. I have also experienced my greatest psychological peace and safety in nature, not

at all unusual given my personality type. Bringing this awareness into my work seems so important, given not only the separateness from nature that we all experience in our daily lives but also the acute separateness from nature that occurs during a hospitalization or other psychological crisis. Awareness of our own need for nurture by our environment can improve our ability to learn in the action-reflection model, and thus help us to be more sensitive to the needs of our patients, the “living human documents”, for whom nurture by their contact with nature can be healing and even life-prolonging.

Conclusion

It is my deeply held conviction that everything in creation is inherently good and can be trusted to fit perfectly into some complex part of the circle of life. Existential trust, you might call it. In the theories I have presented here, I have made an attempt to articulate what I base that trust upon and how I can make effective use of that trust in the practice of counseling, life coaching, and clinical spiritual care. As I weave together the acceptance of the other modeled by Rogers, the acceptance of the other’s temperament modeled by Keirse, and the overall importance of my relationship to our natural environment, I find I can be no other way than trusting, accepting, compassionate, and inclusive. That is a gift I hope I can give the gentle souls I am blessed to journey with.

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