

## Preface

Over the last years, colleagues and friends have encouraged me to translate more of my writing into the English language. Indeed, compared to my publications in the German language, my complete works from the perspective of an (only) English-speaking reader are extremely small—hardly a dozen papers and book chapters. Moreover, some are in volumes addressed more to colleagues from the natural sciences or systems theoretic psychology. And that is hardly something that therapists, for example, want to read.

This book now contains seven chapters based on the translations of papers focusing on the concept of self-actualization. I chose this term—an alternative to “self-organization”—in order to particularly address the work to people interested in and influenced by Carl Rogers’ person-centered approach to psychotherapy. Moreover, the preference for “self-actualization” should make it clear that processes of self-organization in the context of matter or even biology are not our concern in this book.

Admittedly, examples from those fields of study will be used to explain some essential principles. This is due to the fact that these examples can be treated and discussed in a much more isolated way, and are therefore “simple” compared with the much greater complexity of the cognitive and interactive processes of human beings.

However, understanding some *principles* by way of examples from the natural sciences does not at all entail the reduction of psychological and social *phenomena* and processes to natural science. For example, we could use the process of growth in a deciduous tree to explain that the *principle* of “growth” in humanistic psychology does

not mean “more and more” (as is in economics) but “die and become” in adaptation to the changing environment (here: the seasons). However, this does not mean that I want to reduce personal growth to biological phenomena.

I hope this remark prevents any misunderstanding regarding the intention of this book.

Focusing on self-actualization only rather implicitly hints at some ideas of a broader approach that I have been working on for more than two decades, which I called “Person centered Systems Theory”. The work needed for an adequate translation of papers directly addressed to that context would have gone far beyond the capacities of this project. However, I don’t see a problem in accepting constraints. On the contrary, every paper or book is meant as an invitation for a cognitive encounter. I wonder who will feel invited.

Writing in a foreign language or translating well elaborated descriptions and argumentations into another language is hard work. I am very grateful for the extensive help given by Colleen Beaumont, Henry D. Cooke, and Cliodhna Quigley. Special thanks also to the students of the “European Graduate School” (EGS), Saas Fee, Switzerland, with whom I was able to discuss provisional drafts of some English papers, as well as to my colleagues from the EGS faculty, particularly Majken Jacoby from Denmark.

May this book contribute to the task of providing psychologists and psychotherapists with more adequate concepts and metaphors for an understanding of the intra- and interpersonal processes of human beings than the inadequate metaphors and principles of mechanistic science.

June, 2006 Jürgen Kriz

## **Introduction**

Is there a difference between beating out the dents in a tin can or repairing a defective engine, and making an intervention with a living being or even working with a patient in a psychotherapeutic manner?

Most people, and not just advocates of humanistic psychology, would agree with and plead for such a difference. Some would even add that this difference is essential.

But what are the concepts, terms, metaphors and principles that we have and use as cognitive tools to grasp, explain and discuss human development, pathogenesis or psychotherapy? After 400 years of great success on the part of the classical mechanistic science as an essential basis of today's culture, our world is filled with machines, apparatus, tools, and "things", and has changed the face of our planet. Over many generations, our inner images—the metaphors and principles we use in understanding our every-day life—became, of course, more and more related to the outer images of what we perceive and experience: things and mechanical apparatus (and consequently, the effective handling of rather complicated machines is reduced in our every-day world to the operation of simple mechanical apparatus, for example to press a knob, to flick a switch and so on).

No wonder then that it seemed self-evident to use these metaphors and principles to understand and explain other areas of the "world"—when we are dealing with living

beings, with other humans and last but not least with ourselves. This tendency seems to be even stronger when we try to give rational or “scientific” explanations. Although modern science has changed its world view and its explanatory principles tremendously, the informal narratives and metaphors of culture don’t adapt as quickly, but instead still convey the “same old stories” of what “science” is. And this still involves the use of a toolbox of mechanistic principles (which are indeed rather adequate in dealing with the restricted apparatus of our technical world).

Moreover, the world view of modern science is rather anti-intuitive, highly sophisticated—expressed in the main by differential equations and even more complicated mathematical tools. In short, this new world view is a “closed session” of scientists and is and will be very slow to change the classical ideology.

As a consequence, the *knowledge* that there is an essential difference between an engine and a human being and the *will* to adequately respect this are not enough to effect a change, if we still use the cognitive tools from mechanistic science. Even in the writings and sayings of humanistic therapists, we find many mechanistic metaphors that allude more to the principles of flattening a dented tin can than of facilitating the self-organized transition of an ailing structure of life-processes to a more satisfying one.

I want to further elucidate this point by discussing one aspect.

We have clear terms to refer to somebody’s change from “being healthy” to the “state” of “being ill”, for example “pathogenesis”. Similarly, we have clear terms for referring to the opposite situation—somebody’s change from “being ill” to the “state” of “being healthy”, for example “therapy”. In general, such clear terms always

correspond to the main topics of explanation in active areas of discussion. And indeed, we do want to explain why “things” are changing and who or what has made the change. If a dented tin can is suddenly in good shape again, we ask who did it and how he did it. In contrast, if the can remains in its former state (considered over a reasonable time-frame), nothing seems to need to be explained. Things don’t change until somebody changes them. And it’s for this reason that we don’t have and don’t need terms to describe the absence of change.

However, focusing on the *processes* of life change is natural and normal. You cannot step into the same river twice, because neither the river nor you are exactly the same and, moreover, the experience of the “first time” is lost. Therefore, in the stream of moments of an ever changing world of processes, we don’t so much need to explain “change”, but rather “no-change” or stability.

What are the cognitive and linguistic “tools” that we use to conceptually and terminologically refer to this phenomenon of “no-change”? In the case of being healthy, the term “salutogenesis” has been around for some years, but it’s so brand-new that many people haven’t heard of it at all. But how to refer to being (and staying!) “pathological”?

I personally don’t know of any term, although in the last hundred years since Sigmund Freud, nearly all psychotherapists have stressed the point that symptoms can be equated with the absence of the ability to change and to adapt to new tasks and requirements. In general, if there is no term available to describe a particular phenomenon, this is a pretty good sign that it is not important in the discourses. And this again indicates that in our reifying culture the tin-can-metaphor is more typical than the idea of processes.

Self-actualization, the title of this book, refers to a core concept both in Carl Rogers' person-centered approach to psychotherapy and in modern systems theory. Rogers took this term from theoretical approaches which are in line with modern systems theory (for example Gestalt and organismic theory). Moreover, he was one of very few psychologists who were aware of the rise of modern systems theory which supported his conceptions, for example Ilya Prigogine's Nobel-prize win in chemistry 1977 for his "dissipative structures" (a special version of self-organization theory).

However, even many psychologists and therapists claiming themselves to be in accordance with the person-centered approach did not understand this essential principle for a long time (and some don't even today) and preferred just to use the therapeutic procedures and, at best, the "philosophy" of a personal relationship. Thus weakened, the person-centered approach wasn't able to offensively defend its essential principles in the highly competitive area of psychotherapeutic approaches, which was influenced by the forces of an increasing reductionism towards genetic explanations and medical treatments.

In this book, I want to discuss the idea of self-actualization in the context of different themes. The intention is to provide the reader with thoughts, ideas, metaphors and knowledge which are more adequate to understand processes of life—especially on the cognitive and interactional level. First, some additional clarification of the term "self-actualization" should be given:

Self-actualization has a double meaning, which is due to the different uses of the word "self".

Firstly, "self-actualization" refers to the universal phenomenon that a system, particularly an organism, need

not be “formed”, “ordered” or structured” by an “organizer” which integrates the elements into an organized whole. Instead, given an appropriate environment, it will unfold itself in an orderly way. This was stressed, among others, by the Gestalt psychologist Kurt Goldstein (1878 – 1965), who, after his emigration to the USA, became more famous as an “organismic theorist”.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore *the term “self” in “self-actualization” functions as a terminological focus on “self-made” in contrast to “made from outside”.*

Of course, Goldstein and other organismic theorists did not mean that the organism is immune to the events and forces of the external world. Conversely, the environment is both a source of supplies and disturbances with which the organism must cope. For example, Goldstein wrote:

*The tasks are determined by the “nature” of the organism, its “essence”, which is brought into actualization through environmental changes that act upon it. The expressions of that actualization are the performances of the organism. Through them the organism can deal with the respective environmental demands and actualize itself.” (1939, p. 111) Therefore, the healthy organism is one “in which the tendency towards self-actualization is acting from within, and overcomes the disturbance arising from the clash with the world” (1939, p. 305).*

It is fascinating how much this notion and world view corresponds with the thoughts of modern interdisciplinary systems theory, which appeared in the natural sciences more than three decades after the publication of Gold-

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<sup>1</sup> like Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972), known for his general systems theory or Andras Angyal (1902-1960), known for the “biosphere”.

stein's fundamental book "The Organism" (1939, German edition 1934).<sup>2</sup>

In modern systems theory, "self-organization" refers to the phenomenon that a system organizes itself due to inner structural possibilities (in relation to the environment but not structurally enslaved by it). Moreover, when Goldstein talks about the "re-organization" of old patterns into new and more effective or better adapted patterns, this is exactly what we mean by "phase transition" in modern systems theory. In particular, the interdisciplinary approach of "Synergetics" by Hermann Haken provides a conceptual basis and framework for facilitating cooperations between those psychologists and natural scientists who are interested in understanding complex autonomous (but not isolated or immune) processes of self-organized order.

Secondly, the term "self-actualization" is a core concept in the "person-centered" (or "client-centered") approach to psychotherapy developed by Carl R. Rogers (1902-1987). However, Rogers was also a famous theorist of personality and his elaborated self theory in particular is cited by many psychologists. For example, 50 years ago the handbook on "Theories of Personality" by Hall and Lindzey included a chapter on Rogers' self theory, stating "Rogers' theory on personality represents a synthesis of phenomenology as presented by Snygg and Combs, of holistic and organismic theory as developed in the writings of Goldstein, Maslow, and Angyal, of Sullivan's interpersonal theory, and of self theory for which

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<sup>2</sup> Of course there were always similar holistic and systemic thoughts in our and in other cultures, before and after Goldstein. I want to at least mention the collaboration between the psychologist C.G. Jung and the Nobel-physicist Wolfgang Pauli on "archetypes" which, partly even in the mathematical details, anticipated concepts that came up (again) in the discourses of systems theory decades later—cf. Kriz 1998

Rogers himself is largely responsible...” (Hall and Lindzey 1957, p. 478).

Unlike Goldstein, who wasn't interested in an explicit and particular self-theory, the “self” as a nuclear concept in Rogers' theory of personality is a differentiated object of discourse. In a series of nineteen propositions, formulated in “Client-centered Therapy” (1951), Rogers states: “8. A portion of the total perceptual field gradually becomes differentiated as the self” and “9. As a result of interaction with the environment, and particularly as a result of evaluational interactions with others, the structure of the self is formed—an organized, fluid, but constant conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relationships of the ‘I’ or the ‘me’ together with the values attached to these concepts”.

Psychopathology is understood to result from an “incongruence” of the organismic experiences and their symbolization by the self, due to introjections—according to Rogers “values introjected or taken over from others, but perceived in a distorted fashion, as if they had been experienced directly.” As a consequence, some experiences may be “ignored because there is no perceived relationship to the self-structure” or “denied symbolization or given a distorted symbolization because the experience is inconsistent with the structure of the self”.

Therefore, for Rogers the distinction between the human organism—which is the total individual and the basis for the totality of experience (the phenomenal field)—and the self—which is a differentiated, structured portion of this field—is essential.

In Rogers' theory, the organizational development of the human organism is understood in accordance with the organismic theorists to be autonomous (but not isolated or immune) and is called “actualization”. Additionally, Rogers calls the organizational development of the self,

also understood to be autonomous (but not isolated or immune), “self-actualization”.

Therefore, in Rogers’ theory, *the term “self” in “self-actualization” functions as a terminological focus on the “self” in contrast to the totality of experience or the “actualization” of the organism.*

Of course, actualizing a “self” by means of self-actualization is the typical and essential capability of the actualization of the human organism in contrast to the actualization of the organisms of animals or plants (which do not, as far as we know today, develop a “self”).

As already mentioned, the term “self” in the interdisciplinary discourses on “self-organization” refers to the first meaning, i.e. it stresses the aspect of being ordered and organized by itself and not by an “organizer” which imposes order from outside the system. From this perspective, the actualization of the organism is, of course, due to self-organization (as the organismic theorists had already said). Moreover, the actualization of the “self” can also be understood by way of self-organization of cognitive processes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This, of course leads to a terminological Problem. From the perspective of systems theory, therefore, Rogers “self-actualization” means “self”-self-organization. This is, of course, a strange and complicated term. Whenever this problem occurs we should therefore replace “self-organization” with “automorphism” (a term which was already used in the dialog between C.G. Jung and Wolfgang Pauli, because the term “self-organization” wasn’t in the scientific discourses and Pauli, therefore, referred to the work of the famous French mathematicians Poincarè, Julia and Fatou who developed the fundamentals of systems and chaos theory five to eight decades before the Americans Edward Lorenz or Benoit Mandelbrot, in ignorance of European thought, re-detected and re-developed chaos-theory, fractal geometry and so on).

Instead of self-self-organization we should speak of “self”-automorphism.

It should be clear that this terminological problem occurs not only with respect to person-centered theory, but also in many psychological

In this book, however, I have tried to avoid these terminological problems. In many cases the phenomena are dealt with in a rather general manner by using therefore the neutral term “self-organization”. However, the reader with an interest in therapeutic aspects is asked to fill out these descriptions with his knowledge and experience concerning self-actualization and actualization of the “self”.

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texts which refer both to the interdisciplinary discourse on self-organization and to the “self” as a psychological construct. For example, in many psychological texts talking about “self-regulation”, “self-development” and so on, I feel confused and lost by the question of whether the author is talking about something that means “auto”-regulation or “auto”-development (stressing the autonomous aspects), or if he wants to discuss the regulation or the development of the “self” as a psychological construct.

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