

VIEWPOINTS

Tomorrow's Person: A Reflective Essay on Carl Rogers' Brave New World

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Carl Rogers (1980), a founding figure in humanistic psychology, concluded his seminal work *A Way of Being* with a future-oriented chapter titled “The World of Tomorrow, and the Person of Tomorrow”. Written during a period of significant global change and an American-led counterculture, Rogers set forth a hope-filled yet grounded picture of the social, psychological, and existential world he envisioned. In contrast, and in a parallel universe far, far away, I was beginning my life as a child of the 1970s in regional New South Wales, Australia. The idea that people my age and younger might be his “tomorrow’s people” resonates deeply with me. The following reflective essay considers the philosophical underpinnings of Rogers’ vision of tomorrow’s people and wonders out loud—or at least on the page—about its implications for contemporary society and its alignment with current counselling and psychotherapy praxis in Australia.

Carl Rogers (1980) began his chapter “The World of Tomorrow, and the Person of Tomorrow” with a statement of vulnerability and congruence. In a quintessentially Rogerian manner, he wrote,

I have an uneasy feeling about this chapter, a feeling I have experienced before. In some vague way, I believe that what I am saying here will someday be fleshed out more fully, either by me or by someone else. (p. 339)

Just as those might have who encountered Carl Rogers in person, I felt enlivened by his printed words, as if he had spoken directly to me. His words elicited a sense of personal attunement and emotional resonance, reflecting the profound interpersonal connection central to the person-centred approach (Cooper, 2019; Murphy, 2017).

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In “The World of Tomorrow, and the Person of Tomorrow”, Rogers (1980) acknowledged three future scenarios. The first two are dystopian; they involve nuclear conflict and rapid technological advancement, which presage detrimental outcomes for society and the environment. Echoes of these themes are also found in Huxley’s (2014) *Brave New World*. The third, more hopeful scenario proposes that humans will evolve socially and psychologically to meet the demands of a world encountering accelerated change. Rogers envisioned “tomorrow’s person” as endowed with a particular skill set and emotional intelligence. These qualities included openness to experience, an internal locus of control, authenticity, congruence, empathy, and the capacity for deep interpersonal connection, tolerance of ambiguity, and a process-oriented mindset.

Rogers (1980) observed the increasing emergence of these future beings in younger generations and those engaged in self-exploration. He contrasted these emerging identities with rigid, authoritarian personalities, informed by industrial-age institutions to value control, uniformity, and external validation. Crucially, Rogers tied this transformation to broader social movements—such as the decline of rigid hierarchies in education, religion, and governance—and to the increasing accessibility of therapeutic and self-reflective spaces, thus positioning the future as a psychological and ethical frontier. This article considers Rogers’ vision of hope, the psychological characteristics of the “person of tomorrow”, potential new forms of organisation, the risk of being authentic, implications for practitioners and society, and my reflections on personal resonance.

Reflecting on Rogers’ Vision: Hope Amidst Uncertainty

Rogers’ (1980) optimism is remarkable given the historical period in which he was writing. Geopolitical tensions, civil unrest, and a growing sense of alienation in Western societies characterised the late 20th century, yet Rogers did not dwell on despair. Instead, he grounded his vision in the actualising tendency towards growth and fulfilment, which he considered the innate drive within all organisms (his preferred term for people; Rogers, 1965, 1980).

Similarly to the United States in the mid-1970s, contemporary Australia echoes the historical tensions Rogers (1980) described: Geopolitical instability, climate anxiety, technological alienation, and rapid social change coexist in an environment saturated with information and existential threats (Su et al., 2021). Contemporary Australian society also sits between hope and hopelessness. Here, all three of Rogers’ (1980) possible worlds converge and compete for their place in an endless 24-hour news cycle. Nonetheless, what does this have to do with counselling and psychotherapy praxis, I hear you ask? Well, everything. Tomorrow’s people today occupy and exist in worlds in which technology and globalisation are ubiquitous, and disconnecting from self and others is not a possibility, but an algorithmic reality. Rogers’ frameworks become highly relevant as counsellors and psychotherapists seek to support individuals navigating these realities.

Importantly, Rogers' (1980) belief in human potential aligns with modern shifts towards strength-based therapeutic models, including positive psychology (Compton & Hoffman, 2020), interpersonal neurobiology (Siegel, 2020), and trauma-informed practice (Moreland-Capua, 2019; Tujague & Ryan, 2023). Moving from pathology-focused (Rogers-Sirin, 2017) to growth-oriented paradigms emphasises resilience, self-regulation, and relational attunement, thus reinforcing Rogers' (1980) assertion that hope is not naïve; rather, it is essential for psychological survival and flourishing.

This perspective is both validating and challenging. It reminds me that the impulse to become (to grow, learn, and connect) competes with an existential tension embodied in simply being. To be present and attuned with our clients requires an acceptance of self and trust in the dynamic unfolding quality of the here and now. However, accessing hope amidst uncertainty requires practitioners to embody presence, tolerance for ambiguity, and acceptance (Hayes et al., 2012). Paradoxically, making friends with the present moment appears key to moving forward, and this way of thinking invites a counselling and psychotherapy praxis that models authenticity and emotional flexibility, rather than prescribing certainty or fixed solutions.

Rogers' "Person of Tomorrow": Psychological Characteristics

According to Rogers (1980), the person of tomorrow is characterised by traits that mirror the conditions of their own person-centred therapy: congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. These are not only therapeutic conditions but also existential human capacities. Rogers believed that tomorrow's person does not cling to fixed identities but trusts in an unfolding process of self and tolerates ambiguity.

Today, Rogers' insights remain strikingly relevant. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) echoes Rogers' (1980) emphasis on the psychological necessity of autonomy, competence, and relatedness for wellbeing, mirroring his focus on internal evaluation and authentic living. Similarly, mindfulness and emotion regulation research highlights openness to experience, non-reactivity, and cognitive flexibility as fundamental to psychological resilience (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Zou et al., 2020).

However, living this way is neither easy nor socially reinforced. It demands a level of vulnerability and presence that can feel countercultural. Authenticity and congruence may appear risky in an era dominated by performative success metrics, conformity pressures, and hyper-individualism (Brown, 2018). The pressure to conform, perform, and suppress "unacceptable" emotions can be strong. However, Rogers (1980) invited us to consider authenticity not as a luxury but as a necessity for psychological survival in a complex world.

The capacity to tolerate ambiguity, identified by Rogers (1980) as a critical trait of tomorrow's people, is increasingly recognised as a predictor of adaptive coping and creativity (Gard & Leung, 2020; Stoycheva, 2024). Thus, fostering the person of tomorrow requires social ecologies that support vulnerability, exploration, and critical self-reflection rather than punishment.

The Dualities of Decentralisation and New Forms of Organisation

Rogers (1980) imagined that rigid hierarchical systems would dissolve and give way to more decentralised, participatory structural forms (Borstelmann, 2012). He viewed this shift occurring in education, government, and interpersonal relationships. This decentralisation is not merely political but psychosocial; it reflects a shift in the locus of evaluation from external to internal.

This perspective strongly complements Paulo Freire's (2000) work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which Freire advocates for dialogical, non-authoritarian educational structures and collaborative knowledge production (Suzina & Tufte, 2020). Freire's (2000) thinking aligns with contemporary and popular models of transformational leadership, which prioritise collaboration, empathy, and collective vision (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Brown, 2018).

Yet, as Rogers (1980) anticipated, decentralisation can be double-edged. While it offers freedom and democratisation, it also facilitates instability, fragmentation, and the erosion of shared truth. The rise of misinformation and polarised online communities in the digital era is a sobering reminder that freedom must be accompanied by discernment. Perhaps this is where we currently find ourselves: battle-weary and suspended in a media-saturated society. The collapse of centralised truth sources has contributed to phenomena such as misinformation, tribalism, and epistemic fragmentation in the digital era (Lawson et al., 2023; Lewandowsky et al., 2017). As Rogers (1980) imagined, the person of tomorrow must therefore be not only autonomous but also critically reflective: able to hold multiple truths, engage in honest dialogue, and take ethical responsibility for their actions in order to avoid chaos and collapse.

The Person of Today: Authenticity and the Risk of Being Real

Rogers (1980) consistently advocated for authenticity—the alignment of inner experience and outward expression—as a hallmark of psychological maturity. This perspective is echoed in existential contemporaries, particularly in the works of Rollo May (1981), who described authenticity as the courage to face one's reality without distortion. However, authentic expression remains socially risky. In different social and cultural contexts, authenticity may conflict with societal norms that reward emotional suppression and conformity. Perhaps a salient example of this can be seen in the public discourse and violence directed at transgendered populations (Evje et al., 2024).

Authenticity fosters deeper relationships and a greater sense of self-worth (Joseph & Linley, 2006; Wood et al., 2008). In therapeutic and educational settings, congruence has been shown to create trust and psychological safety (Cooper, 2024; McLeod, 2009; Mearns & Cooper, 2017). However, in many professional and cultural settings, being real is risky. Congruence may mean disagreeing, being uncertain, or challenging prevailing norms (Hutton & Sisko, 2021). From a counselling perspective, modelling authenticity is crucial. A therapist's congruence enhances the therapeutic alliance and client outcomes (Norcross & Lambert, 2018). Equally, fostering authenticity within clients' lived experiences becomes a radical act of empowerment.

Reflecting on my experiences as a therapist and an educator, I recognise the tension between the desire for acceptance and the imperative to be true to myself. Rogers (1980) offers a compelling framework for navigating this tension: When we trust our internal process and offer our real selves in relationships, we create the conditions for mutual growth. His client-centred therapy becomes, in this sense, a philosophy of life. Thus, counselling praxis must balance supporting clients' safety needs and encouraging genuine self-expression, particularly within systems that penalise difference.

Implications for Practice and Society

Rogers' (1980) chapter has profound implications beyond counselling and psychotherapy. In his other work, Rogers (1969) called for educational systems that support student autonomy and emotional growth, workplaces that prioritise empathy and collaboration, and therapeutic practices that honour the client's subjective experience. In education, learner-centred pedagogies rooted in autonomous support and emotional attunement reflect Rogers' vision (as cited in Cornelius-White, 2007).

Trauma-informed care and humanistic health care models similarly prioritise client agency and relational connection (Knight, 2019). However, bureaucracies typically favour efficiency over empathy, and control over creativity (Illeris, 2018). Rogers (1980) challenges us to imagine, and embody, a different kind of system: one that is built not on fear and compliance, but on trust, dialogue, and mutual respect.

Counsellors, educators, and leaders committed to Rogers' vision must engage in critical praxis, challenging oppressive structures while embodying relational ethics in their own practices. The emergence of community-centred leadership models, participatory design approaches, and peer-led mental health initiatives suggests that the seeds of Rogers' decentralised, humanistic future are already sprouting, even amidst resistance (Raelin, 2016).

Personal Resonance

On reading Rogers' (1980) chapter, I was struck by its timeliness and depth. The person of tomorrow feels like both a psychological archetype and a personal aspiration. I see glimpses of this person in myself and in others committed to growth, connection, and ethical living. At the same time, I

recognise the vulnerability involved in this journey. Living with openness, authenticity, and empathy requires continuous self-reflection and courage; it is an ongoing process rather than a fixed destination.

This insight holds profound implications for counselling and psychotherapy: Our presence, attunement, and willingness to sit with ambiguity become powerful catalysts for client growth. In embodying the principles Rogers (1980) articulated, we actively shape tomorrow's worlds, one relational encounter at a time. Rogers reminds me that psychological development is not about achieving perfection but rather engaging with life in all its messiness—with curiosity, compassion, and a willingness to grow. His vision is radical because it suggests that the future is not “out there” but begins within each of us.

Conclusion

Carl Rogers' (1980) chapter “The World of Tomorrow, and the Person of Tomorrow” is a visionary and enduring contribution to humanistic ways of being. More than four decades after its publication, the chapter remains a vital resource for anyone seeking to understand human development in an age of uncertainty. By emphasising authenticity, empathy, decentralisation, and openness to experience, Rogers offers a psychosocial framework for navigating the complexities of modern life. His person of tomorrow is not a distant ideal but a call to action to live with greater presence, accountability, and relational depth. As therapists, educators, leaders, and tomorrow's people, we are invited to embody the qualities that will help co-create today's world, as it informs and aligns with our future self and time, one conversation, connection, relationship, and courageous act of authenticity at a time.

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