

Principles of Psychoanalytic Centrism

Gerald Schoenewolf PhD

Principles of Psychoanalytic Centrism

By Gerald Schoenewolf Ph.D.

ebook 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

All Rights Reserved

This e-book contains material protected under International and Federal Copyright Laws and Treaties. This e-book is intended for personal use only. Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is prohibited. No part of this book may be used in any commercial manner without express permission of the author. Scholarly use of quotations must have proper attribution to the published work. This work may not be deconstructed, reverse engineered or reproduced in any other format.

Created in the United States of America

Copyright © 2010 Gerald Schoenewolf

About the Author

Gerald Schoenewolf, Ph.D. is a New York State licensed psychologist who has practiced psychotherapy for over 33 years. He has authored 25 professional articles and 13 books on psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. His books include *101 Common Therapeutic Blunders*, *The Art of Hating*, *Counterresistance* and *Psychotherapy with People in the Arts*. He has also written and directed two feature films— *Therapy* and *Brooklyn Nights*. He lives in the Pennsylvania Poconos with his wife, Julia.

Principles of Psychoanalytic Centrism

A healthy individual is an individual who has a strong ego that can mediate between the id and the superego. As Freud put it, "Where id was, there ego shall be." Thus, a healthy individual is centered. He or she is not dominated by the id or the superego. Such an individual is neither all work nor all play. Such an individual is not plagued by impossible standards, religious beliefs or compulsions; nor is such an individual driven by impulsive desires or sentimental beliefs. A healthy individual is a grounded individual who respects the urges of the id and pleas of the superego but does not necessarily give in to them. This individual is open-minded, but not to the point of being unrealistic. This individual is spontaneous, but not to the point of being without boundaries. This individual seeks pleasure, but not at the expense of responsibility; nor seeks responsibility at the expense of pleasure. First and foremost, a healthy individual is a balanced individual, leaning neither too far to the left nor to the right.

A healthy group (i.e., culture) is a group that has a strong center that can mediate between the left and right. It is not dominated by the left or the right. It is neither all work nor all play. It is not plagued by impossible standards, religious beliefs or compulsions, nor is it driven by impulsive desires or sentimental beliefs and ideals. A healthy group is a grounded group that

respects the pleas of the left for equal rights and the demands of the right for responsibility but does not necessarily give in to them. The healthy group is open-minded but not to a point that it invites danger. The healthy group seeks pleasure without disregarding responsibility and is responsible without disregarding pleasure. It wants rights for all people, not for selected people.

With regard to psychoanalytic research, the centrist leads toward a neutral and unbiased view. Freud was a centrist and so were all of the early pioneers of psychoanalysis. Freud did not want either religious or political sentiments to becloud psychoanalytic research. Instead, he strove for neutrality. I also consider myself a psychoanalytic centrist and have attempted to take a neutral point of view. Throughout this book I have used theories and concepts from many schools of psychoanalysis, trying to blend them into a centrist thesis, and I have sought a balanced viewpoint with an underpinning of reason rather than moral righteousness. Because a dogmatic form of liberalism has become the trend today, I have been most critical of these leftist tendencies that I believe have taken over the field and have suppressed and censored all other points of view, including the centrist view.

The bottom line is that I believe centrism to be the healthiest attitude. It is the most objective and least biased way to look at life. It is the kind of centrism found in the most ancient and time-tested philosophies, such as Taoism or Buddhism in the East and Socrates in the West. And it is this centrism that has

the potential of leading humans out of our aggressive, competitive and destructive mode towards a more viable future.

10 Principles of Centrism

1. There are two or more sides to every question.

The more extreme one's ideas are—whether extreme right or left, the more one-sided they will be on every issue. A centrist considers all sides of a question and everything in between. An extremist is convinced that only his/her side matters and negates the other side and all that is in between.

2. Human situations are complex.

A centrist considers the complexity of each situation, understanding that humanity and human life is ruled by contradiction. Every individual and every group operates on the basis of a plethora of causes and effects, and therefore is driven by a mixture of thoughts, feelings and motivations. Religious and political people look for moral answers. The more extreme they are, the more they apply a simple point of view and a simple solution to all situations.

3. It is important to make distinctions.

A centrist understands that there are various shades of gray, and only by considering all the shades can we make sound decisions that lead to resolution. Extremists only see what they want to see, they see only black and white and insist that black and white is the only truly important thing to see. They demand that all people stop making distinctions and accuse those who make distinctions of waffling, and of not having the courage to take a stand, which leads to strife.

4. Moderation is the key.

Centrists use constructive language and make reasonable decisions that avoid provocative and manipulative words and actions; hence they resolve rather than inflame a situation. Extremists use provocative words, make manipulative decisions and engage in actions that inflame a situation and worsen it.

5. Prejudice is often in the eye of the beholder.

Prejudice exists, but it exists universally. There is no one group that has a monopoly on being a victim. Everybody victimizes someone, and everybody has been victimized by someone. Extremists look for prejudice everywhere. Centrists seek what's there.

6 . The truth will set you free.

Centrists face reality, even though that reality may be unpleasant. Extremists believe in religious or political dogma and do not look any further than that. When an alcoholic accepts the truth—that he is an alcoholic—he begins to be freed from his alcoholism. When a person accepts reality, whatever it is, he is then free of the myths that entrap him. When a group accepts reality, it is free of the group myths that entrap it.

7. Calm rational discussions lead to real solutions.

Centrists engage in calm, rational discussions and negotiations that lead to compromise solutions. Such solutions, in which there is give and take, lead to peace and harmony. Extremists, ruled by their emotion, believe in forcing their views on others, as these views are considered either sacred (handed down by God) or politically correct (handed down by group consensus). Forced views do not lead to peace and harmony.

8. It is best to be open-minded.

The centrist open-minded and not wedded to any idea or stance. If you start by being open-minded to each situation, you will find the solution that works. If you start by being closed-minded, you will only find the solution that works for you but negates other solutions. This leads to constant strife.

9. Healthy relationships require mutual respect and cooperation.

Centrists have an attitude of mutual respect and cooperation toward all, no matter what their point of view; this leads to constructive communication. Extremists have an us-against-them attitude and only respect and cooperate with those who are seen as allies. They idealize their allies and demean their opponents, and they insist on having their way; this leads to conflict.

10. The search for right and wrong is a sickness.

Accept yourself and be compassionate toward your darker parts, and you will be compassionate toward all others. Hide your darker parts, and you will look for the darker parts of other and be quick to accuse and condemn them of high treason.