

## 9 Psychopathology and the person-centred perspective

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### Introduction

As a phenomenon, psychopathology is inseparable from human existence. Although there is no conclusive confirmation, there is evidence of people experiencing purported 'abnormal' behaviours since prehistoric times, which were attributed to evil spirits.

Since then, knowledge about human functioning has led, over the centuries, to significant changes in the interpretation of psychopathology, ranging from Hippocrates' classification of the four body fluids and the recurrence of theories of demonic possession (Middle Ages) to the medical reform movements led by Chiarugi, Pinel, and Rush, and current nosological classifications (Halgin and Whitbourne, 2005). Presently, the most consensual classifications pertain to the scope of medical science and are aimed at obtaining a correct diagnosis through compliance with a series of objectively described criteria, such as those of the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) or the ICD-10 (World Health Organization, 1992).

However, the field of psychopathology transcends the need for appropriate diagnosis. It is defined as 'the study of unusual, distressing and dysfunctional psychological conditions' (Joseph and Worsley, 2005: 1). As an idiosyncratic set of experiences, psychopathology is often marked by considerable suffering and can play an important role in understanding a person asking for psychological help. However, this role depends on how psychopathology is conceptualized and integrated in the clinical understanding of a person and his or her therapeutic process.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to offer an approach to psychopathology from the perspective of client-centred therapy, taking into account the evolution of Rogerian thought and subsequent contributions.