
CARL ROGERS A REMARKABLE MAN

by

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"We mark with light in the memory, the few interviews we have had, in the dreary years of routine and of sin, with souls that made our souls wiser; that spoke what we thought; that told us what we knew; that gave us leave to be what we inly were."

EMERSON, *Divinity School Address*
1838

(ROGERS 1951)

During the last two years it has been my good fortune to attend a course on the person-centred approach to psychotherapy at the School of Independent Study at North East London Polytechnic.

The recent death of Carl Rogers has caused me to reflect on his work, and to focus on my own experiences of the person-centred approach both as a student and potential therapist. I have a deep respect and affection for this most remarkable man.

For more than three decades, Carl was an influential figure in the field of humanistic psychology. He was a rebel who put forward a challenge to many of the concepts and attitudes to traditional psychology. He was also a social revolutionary, and challenged the usual concepts on which our society is based; - that power is power over and strength is strength to control. The paradox that he pointed to is that influence is gained as power is shared, and control is more constructive when it is self-control.

In the course of my studies, I have come to appreciate the vast extent of his influence, and widely claimed innovations in counselling technique, personality theory, philosophy of science, psychotherapy research, encounter groups and student-centred teaching. During the last ten years he gave much of his time to fostering cross-cultural communication, and attended workshops in many countries, including Hungary, Russia and Ireland. The opening sentence of *Ethical Standards of Psychologists*, the official code laid down by the American Psychological Association (1959) defines a psychologist as a person "committed to increasing man's understanding of man". Of man in general and man in particular, Carl Rogers did just this.

His view of mankind was a confident one. He had little sympathy with the prevalent concept that human beings are basically irrational, and that their impulses if not controlled, will lead them to destroy themselves. To him, human

behaviour was exquisitely rational, and he found that the more fully functioning the individual becomes, the more trustworthy they become; the more they are open to experience, the more socialised they tend to become; and the more their reactions to inner stimuli are available to them, the more they can be trusted to move in ways that make for their own development and that of other people.

He wanted to help people discover a path to personal growth through the understanding of their own limitations and expectations.

Like Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow and Rollo May, he was concerned with the growth and potentiality in man, and he believed in promoting harmoniously mature persons whose many facets are in balance; individuals with qualities and possibilities infinitely capable of development; people who are more flexible in their relationships with others, and who are less open to suggestion, persuasion and control.

Although something of an oversimplification, the following quote from Lao Tsu sums up many of his deeper beliefs about human growth

*"If I keep from meddling with people, they take care of themselves.
If I keep from commanding people, they behave themselves.
If I keep from preaching at people, they improve themselves
If I keep from imposing on people, they become themselves."*

Carl had an attitude of open-mindedness and welcomed new ideas developed by scientific techniques. His work was hospitable to analysis by scientific and experimental techniques, and his formulation of the self, the most fully developed statement of self-theory, has been supported by an imposing amount of empirical evidence . . . yet he found conflict in scientific endeavour and wondered how he could combine living emotional experience with something that was lifeless and lacking in the fullness of experience. His growing conviction was, that although science could never make the therapist, it could help therapy in reaching warm, personal complex forces, and represents the best way we know to the truth.

Words alone cannot do justice to Carl's work, for it is in the personal

experience of being heard, trusted, accepted and understood that his work takes on real meaning. My own experience of the person-centred approach have led me to feel a deep sense of involvement, belonging, acceptance and achievement in a caring human environment. My years of what can only be described as suffering in a conventional authoritarian education that crippled my creative expression and enthusiasm, are as nothing compared to the freedom and trust that I have been given in my time at the School of Independent Study. I have been able to work in a way that best suited my needs as an individual, and to make all the mistakes inherent in such a process . . . and to learn from these at my own pace. It has also been a difficult, demanding and frequently painful experience, but the moments of

relief, intense joy, and a profound sense of gratitude for being accepted for who I am throughout my (still continuing) struggles, have made this the most important experience of my life.

Carl died in the company of loving friends and family. I never knew him personally, but from those who did, I have an impression of a compassionate, humorous down-to-earth man. It would be inappropriate for me to regard him as some kind of "guru", but I am

astounded at the depth and breadth of his vision in his attempts to seek an effective basis for living in a human world; his conception of man that sought to encompass individuals with divergent problems, from all cultures and backgrounds. He had a full, immensely varied and inspired life, so I do not feel sad that he has departed, instead from his work I receive a sense of humane insight, love, compassion, understanding, courage, and the inspiration to carry on working in my own person-centred way.

ROGERS, C.R. 1951: *Client-Centred Therapy: It's Current Practice, implications and Theory*. Constable London.

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOC. 1959. Ethical Standards for Psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 14, 279-82. From *The General and Unique in Psychological Science*, G.W. Allport, In *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research*, 1981. Eds Peter Reason & John Rowan.. John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Love must be nourished like all living things.

There is a "you", a "me" and a "we" and this is the holy trinity of love.

Nothing is a waste unless you want to see it that way.

Wisdom is the ability to accept life as it is - not try to make it what it isn't.

*From Seduction by a Solar Smile by
Constance Larsen (Charles Skilton Ltd)*
