Retro Review Classics

I. Review by **Derek Lawton** and **Seamus Nash**

A Way of Being

By: Carl R. Rogers, Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1980 (new edn, 1996)
ISBN: 978-0395755303

First published in 1980 and re-issued in 2002 on the centenary of Carl Rogers' birth, *A Way of Being* is written in the same personal style as his most popular book *On Becoming a Person*. *A Way of Being* offers the reader a selection of Rogers' papers, some previously published some not, grouped together in four sections, as a celebration of his life's work, from a personal and philosophical perspective. Some of Rogers' most touching and oft-quoted writings are included in this book – for example, his thoughts regarding death; the characteristics of the person-centred approach; the celebrated Empathic: an unappreciated way of being; the famous illustration of the 'potent constructive tendency'; and the actualising nature of all organisms, illustrated through the 'potato sprouts' vignette.

The book traces Rogers' personal and professional development, documenting how his learning about the nature of communication and the valuing of others were informed through many years of experience, and refined through an ongoing process of re-evaluation, culminating in the development of a definable philosophy for facilitating positive growth.

Rogers also shares his thoughts about the need to develop a more human science, with the capacity to accommodate innovations primarily guided by a subjective vision. He goes on to give examples of how learning communities could have a more active involvement in the design and construction of physical and psychological environments where people are accommodated and allowed to thrive.

The second section of the book is centred on Rogers' professional work. It places particular emphasis on the transformation of 'client-centred psychotherapy' into what is now known as the 'person-centred approach' – the application of Rogers' theory in other aspects of human relations, as an approach to life, as an alternative to many of the prevailing social, political and economic norms of the twentieth century. Rogers' (1975) innovative article 'Empathic: an unappreciated way of being' expands on his 1959 central hypothesis. He succinctly summarises the 'nonevaluative' quality of empathy as a complex interpersonal process that interacts with a person's intrapersonal change processes in ways that can foster positive personality change – not a technique applied to the client. Rogers emphasises that when a person's experience resonates with another and its significance is to some degree accurately understood, accepted and communicated, experience will be more fully integrated into awareness, and over time a person's capacity for self-understanding and self-acceptance will be heightened.

Throughout the book Rogers places emphasis on process rather than technique, and whilst emphasising that attitudinal qualities need, to some degree at least, to be accurate and authentic, he openly shares some of his own shortcomings and 'failures'. Such disclosures are encouraging, as they give credence to the possibility that the aspirational attitudinal intention to connect with another person's experience may have therapeutic qualities in excess of merely intellectual accuracy. Similarly, Rogers' emphasis on the interconnectedness between the attitudinal qualities is a clear indication of his desire not to reduce the approach to a set of standardised manualised responses.

There has been much discussion about the difference between Client-Centred Psychotherapy and the application of the Person-Centred Approach. *A Way of Being* is primarily a book about how the Person-Centred Approach as a vehicle for promoting personal growth and empowerment has developed from Client-Centred Psychotherapy. The former is more concerned about

how a person lives their life through the exercise of their actualising tendency – whereas the primary intention of the latter is to attend to the incongruent and inhibiting nature of experience compounded by a thwarted or warped actualising tendency. Rogers has documented that he does not differentiate between how he functions in a large learning group and how he practises psychotherapy, yet the context of a large learning group experience compared with one to one psychotherapy differs greatly. It would therefore be an error to rely on *A Way of Being* as the principal source of psychotherapy guidance.

Rogers revises his (1972) paper 'Some new challenges to the helping professions' and expresses his concerns about how the standardisation and certification of professionals discourages innovation and builds up a rigid bureaucracy. Rogers emphasises that 'there are as many certified charlatans and exploiters of people as there are certified', yet he remained unsure about how psychology could find better ways of 'bringing together those who need help and those who are truly excellent in offering helping relationships'. The majority of practitioners would probably fall somewhere in between Rogers' notion of the 'excellent helper' and the 'charlatan'. Yet to the detriment of Client-Centred Psychotherapy's standing in the wider field of psychotherapy, particularly within the National Health Service, it would appear that there has been little movement in addressing Rogers' concerns, and that an anti-accreditation culture prevails within the Client/Person-Centred community. Perhaps these are concerns for each practitioner to address, not for a community to impose?

The next section of the book is dedicated to the application of person-centred learning, with particular reference to large group processes and the political implications for those who work in the field of education, such as teachers.

In the final section of the book, Rogers speculates about the world of tomorrow and how the 'person of tomorrow' may look – speculations still relevant in 2013. By its very nature this is 'work in progress', and Rogers offers his thinking with some unease. He considers three scenarios of how scientific, technological and medical advances can shape the future, and goes on to offer a list of twelve characteristic qualities that the person of tomorrow may possess. These qualities correspond with Maslow's criteria of the self-actualising person. It is arguable that such people have existed throughout history. Though the materialistic trappings of life may have changed throughout history, once an individual's physical and biological needs have been significantly satisfied, the psychological needs of today's and tomorrow's person are not so dissimilar to the psychological needs of a person at the time of the pharaohs. Likewise, the consequences of psychological, social and educational deprivation are not so dissimilar across time.

There is something hopeful in Rogers' thinking. Although he recognises that positive social change is likely to evoke a hostility and resistance, the developments the world is currently accommodating have the capacity to bring people together in ways previously not possible, and as a consequence may allow more people to nurture those qualities ascribed by Rogers in ways that foster the acceleration of change 'in a direction of more humanness'.

II. Review by **Gillian Proctor**

Person to Person: The Problem of Being Human

By: Carl R. Rogers and Barry Stevens (with contributions from E.T. Gendlin, J.M. Schlien and W. Van Dusen), Souvenir Press, London, 1994

ISBN: 978-0285647176

From the cover: 'A powerful source of enlightenment'

I chose this book of Carl Rogers for a 'Retro-review' because, although not one of his usual classics, I believe it illustrates his theory and values powerfully. It is a presentation of seven papers (four by Rogers, and one each from Gendlin, Schlien and Van Dusen), with commentaries interspersed by Barry Stevens. This structure is described by Rogers saying (on p. 1) that 'each paper... is set in a context of warm human reaction to the paper'. Thus, it presents an opportunity to hear both Rogers' original ideas, *and* further elaborations and developments of his ideas from other classic authors in the person-centred approach, *and* very personal responses which powerfully illustrate the theory from Stevens. Stevens' motive for this book is to make Rogers' ideas accessible to a wider audience, and she believes that his ideas about therapy relationships apply to all relationships.

Person to Person is a beautiful book, beautifully illustrating the concept of congruence, additionally expressing the title and its content in style and manner of

expression. Remarkably, re-reading this book was for me an experience analogous to therapy. As I read, I increasingly felt more self-aware, self-acceptant, open and part of the universe through my encounter with the authors. I was moved, inspired and awed by the insights from so long ago (1967) that are still far from reaching mainstream acceptance, despite the building of evidence for them from many other quarters. This book spoke to me at a time when I was finally preparing to leave working in an institution that no longer facilitated me to be how I wanted to be and, through reading the book, I could let into my awareness my sadness for how constrained I have felt and my deep sorrow at the way that institutions designed to 'help' have become. Stevens introduces the book with a description of how she learnt to distrust her own experience and her resulting confusion from living with both her own experience and external expectations. The first paper from Rogers concerns the valuing process and the infant's journey from trusting its organism to distorting its experience to gain approval. This is followed by an elaboration of the process of the restoration of our inner source of evaluation through therapy, and the common values that this process tends to take clients towards, such as authenticity, acceptance, openness and fluidity.

Stevens' response to this paper is a critique of the concept of 'responsibility' and how we are often called 'irresponsible' when we don't follow fixed rules or conventions. In contrast, she argues that 'When I do and say what everyone says and does, then no-one calls me irresponsible. But at that time, I am.' (p. 32)

Stevens introduces the next section with a plea, saying, 'Can't we ever live *now*?' (p. 44). She introduces a few ideas of what, for her, is related to being 'free', which are a sense of oneness with others and the world, and letting things happen, rather than trying to make things happen (feeling like a passenger rather than a driver of her life). Rogers' following paper is entitled 'Learning to be free', and in it he hypothesises the process of change for a client in reciprocation of the therapist attitudes of congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy. He then bemoans the 'current' trend in education towards conformity, and applies his therapy theory to student-centred learning with the aim of freedom. He also describes in more detail what he means by an inner subjective existential sense of freedom, arguing that 'This experience of freedom is for my clients a most meaningful development, one which assists them in becoming human, in relating to others, in being a person (p. 53) Stevens continues to elaborate this concept of freedom more personally, describing it as 'getting together with myself' (p. 67). She also describes how, when she felt 'unfree', she believed she had done something wrong without knowing what. She presents a lovely description of the effect on her of noticing how she feels, and how this noticing leads to a natural change in how she expresses her feelings to others in a way she likes, with a 'non-cold matter-of-factness' (p. 72).

The next section is introduced by Stevens with a poignant example of being ridiculed as a three year old, which was a powerful reminder to me, as a parent myself of a three year old, to be constantly aware of what he may be picking up from how I talk about him to others. Rogers' following paper is entitled 'The interpersonal relationship: the core of guidance', in which he argues that it is the quality of the relationship that matters in all helping relationships. He presents research demonstrating that the more the client perceives the therapist attitudes, the more they change. He clearly states, 'by assessing a relationship early in its existence, we can to some degree predict the probability of its being a relationship which makes for growth' (p. 101). How slow the therapy world has been to take on this proposition, with systems only recently being set up in the USA and the UK which measure the client's perception of the relationship early in therapy (for example, by using the Session Rating Scale by Miller et al., 2002) and encourage therapists to address this feedback, demonstrating much improved outcomes and reduced drop-outs (see Green and Latchford, 2012). Stevens follows this paper by questioning the concept of unconditional positive regard as meaning constant adoration (from an example used by Rogers), and instead suggesting that mutual respect and honesty are key to effective parenting.

The next section is introduced by Stevens talking about the process of knowing and understanding another, and how little can be put into words. I found this very moving. This is followed by Gendlin's paper on therapist expressivity, particularly with silent or unmotivated clients. He provides very useful guidelines for how therapist expressivity can be non-imposing, and emphasises the importance of the therapist's self-expression to deepen the interaction and to 'express warmth, care, interest, and a person-to-person quality' (p. 124). This paper is a great introduction to working in practice, with a focus on the client's experiencing rather than on words, and the importance of 'sub-verbal' interaction. Stevens' response is so clearly *with* Gendlin, and powerfully applies his ideas to all relationships. She issues a personal clarion-call, saying, 'Is there anything I want more than to feel fully alive and *living*?' (p. 131). She describes an example of such relating which she names 'love ... [where] ...

there are no demands and no necessities' (p. 132).

In the next section, Stevens argues for the distinction between concepts and reality, and for not looking for one fixed answer. She presents a sad and moving description of her thinking that she could have better stayed and accepted her husband's distress instead of trying to make it better, and that this could have prevented his suicide. In the next paper, John Schlien applies Rogers' client-centred approach to clients who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia. He sees schizophrenia as an extreme form of self-deceit, on a continuum with all types of incongruence. For him, 'Freedom means the widest scope of choice and openness to experience, therefore the greatest probability of an adaptive response' (p. 155). He includes a lovely footnote, railing against the misunderstanding of client-centred therapy as 'superficial'. Instead, he conveys the requirements of this kind of relating, saying, 'I have wondered... how many times in my life I will be willing and able to make as deep an investment as seems needed' (p. 155). There is a beautiful description of an exchange between Schlien and a man diagnosed with schizophrenia, including the often-cited 'handkerchief episode', where the client sees Schlien's tears, and offers him his used handkerchief. Schlien concludes, 'It is not the tears, but the exquisite awareness of dual experience that restores consciousness of self' (p. 164). I nearly missed Stevens response; 'Yes.' (p. 166) That says it all.

Stevens' next contribution identifies the commonalities in successful therapy which are trying to achieve (p. 176) 'a switch from dishonesty and competition to honesty and cooperation'. She discusses the difficulties in trying to be spontaneous, and further critiques the idea of trying to make things happen, and being 'proud' when we manage to as opposed to 'happy' when things happen! Rogers' final paper presents learnings from a study of 'psychotherapy with schizophrenics'. His first point is that working with clients who lack motivation for therapy is a bigger problem than clients having a diagnosis of psychosis. He is clear about the place for theory in therapy, suggesting that (p. 186, italics in original) 'in the immediate moment of the relationship, the particular theory of the therapist is irrelevant, and if it is in the therapist's consciousness at that moment, it is probably *detrimental* to therapy'. He further elaborates that once we are thinking about theory with a client, we become a spectator to the relationship, not a player, 'and it is as players that we are effective'. Rogers concludes that (p. 191, italics in original) 'we have been able to reach these schizophrenic individuals as *persons*'. And that (p. 192) 'these moments of real relationship... have been the essential reward for all of us...'. Stevens applies these insights to herself; to her experience that (p. 194) 'there is in each case a person' and illustrates with examples the reward for her in moments of real relationship.

Stevens introduces the final paper by Van Dusen, 'The natural depth in man', with a continuation of her themes of not thinking that we know and not taking credit for things that 'happen'. Van Dusen describes himself as a phenomenologist with (p. 214) 'the task of describing the inner nature of man'. He distinguishes the inner world (*l'autre moi*) from the outer (the ego) by its spontaneity, whereas the outer is consciously directed. He suggests that the language to describe the inner world is poetry and images. He argues that the inner me should be the master, being the wiser. He focuses on his experience of the hypnagogic state (between sleeping and waking), and suggests that in this state (as well as in dreams), words and images arise that represent our inner reality. He suggests that all psychopathology is a fight between inner and outer me, or non-acceptance of inner me as myself. He suggests that it is best when he forgets his egotism or pride, saying (p. 229), 'Ego or pride is separateness, and separateness conflicts with how to be *with* others'. But at the same time, when we can relax into inner me without the ego, everything we perceive is our own representation or (p. 230) 'Any meaning in the world has one's own signature on it.' Ego can open its doors inwardly to the wisdom of '*l'autre moi*' or outwardly to all things (p. 234); 'The natural depth of man is the whole of creation'.

In Stevens' response, she suggests that when we criticise others, it's usually something we do ourselves, or worry we would do it if we see others doing it, so we are really criticising ourselves. She poignantly describes hiding the love in her that others misunderstand and each time dying a little. In her concluding chapter, she describes a few of her experiences to illustrate Van Dusen's statement that 'The natural depth of man is the whole of creation'. Her description of this state is of 'dancing atoms' when boundaries dissolve and everything is in flow.

The book concludes aptly with a poem pleading for children to be curious with patience and be part of a soft patient flowering, rather than trying to force anything. This book is very hard to describe in words, continuing one of the themes of the book. To experience it, read it!

References

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