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## The Work of Carl Rogers

A revered Indian sage at this year's World Symposium was talking about his life. At one period he had spent many weeks travelling on foot up to the summit of one of the holiest and least accessible mountains in India. Here he had spent some time in meditation and fasting and then he retraced his long journey. Back at his home town he was asked what he had learned on the holy mountain. " *I learned that I need not have gone there.*" What he had found was the secret that many assiduous searchers after truth never do find, that ultimately the truth lies always inside oneself.

And this I take to be the guiding philosophy behind the work of Carl Rogers. The truth, the ability, the power, the enormous potential of life all lie within you the individual. Teachers, savants, therapists, experts may be useful fellow travellers along the way, but are all ultimately unnecessary - if we can find the truth within ourselves.

At the American AHP Conference in Princeton this August Carl Rogers was billed to do a 24 hour workshop. He stepped up to the microphone, looked round at the many hundreds of people and said "*The next twenty four hours belong to you*", and left it at that. Resources were there - lights, microphones, loud-speakers, video but the fifteen hundred people were given the responsibility to structure the workshop as they wanted. Not that Carl really **gave** them responsibility: he was just reminding them that they already had it. This had, in fact, been the keynote of his life - a process of discovery of his own internal truths. Carl Rogers had a lonely boyhood without any close friends and with a strictly religious family who kept themselves aloof from their neighbours. His first close intimate relationship was with his wife.

As a clinical psychologist he kept himself 'professionally' aloof and analysed and advised and directed his patients towards better lives. Fortunately for him - and for us - he was living in a small community where his therapeutic failures could not be hidden, and he was sufficiently open-minded to begin to question his own techniques.

A long and totally unsuccessful family therapy was dramatically resolved when the mother accepted Carl's decision that they were getting nowhere and should give up and then promptly switched roles and asked for help for herself. Everything changed: Carl, partly from shock, kept silent and listened; the woman was able to express her deepest feelings in the silence and the son's problems miraculously disappeared. This was how he described this first hint of non directive therapy;

*'This was vital learning for me. I had followed ~~her~~ lead rather than mine. I had just **listened** instead of trying to nudge her towards a diagnostic understanding I had already reached. It was a far more personal relationship and not nearly so 'professional'. Yet the results spoke for themselves' (J.Hum Psych.Vol 13.No 2)*

He went on to develop this new approach to the therapeutic relationship and was able to set up a new Counselling Centre at the University of Chicago. He had realised by now that this was not so much a new method as an entirely new philosophy.

*'I have come to trust persons - their capacity for exploring and understanding themselves and their troubles, and their ability to resolve their problems - in any close, continuing relationship where I can provide a climate of real warmth and understanding. (ibid)*

This, then was the starting point for one of the most influential approaches to a whole range of human activities from psychotherapy to education. This he called - and in 1951 published under the same name - Client Centred Therapy. What was revolutionary about this approach was the claim that at bottom people can be trusted and can learn to trust their own experience rather than the opinions and attitudes of others whether parent, peer, teacher, doctor or other 'expert'.

In the same book he developed a theory of the self as the organism's response to her/his environment as symbolised and accepted into consciousness. He made the point too that what was important was not reality but the individual's

**perception** of reality. These are his original set of nineteen propositions which he said were partly hypotheses and partly assumptions:

- 1) Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the centre.
- 2) The organism reacts to the field as it is experienced and perceived. This perceptual field is, for the individual, 'reality'
- 3) The organism reacts as an organized whole to this phenomenal field.
- 4) The organism has one basic tendency and striving - to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism.
- 5) Behaviour is basically the goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced, in the field as perceived.
- 6) Emotion accompanies and in general facilitates such goal-directed behaviour the kind of emotion being related to the seeking versus

the consummatory aspects of the behaviour, and the intensity of the emotion being related to the perceived significance of the organism.

7) The best vantage point for understanding behaviour is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself.

8) A portion of the total perceptual field gradually becomes differentiated as the self.

9) As a result of interaction with the environment, and particularly as a result of evaluational interaction with others, the structure of self is formed - an organized, fluid, but consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relationships of the 'I' or 'me' with values attached to these concepts.

10) The values attached to experiences, and the values which are a part of the self structure, in some instances are values experienced directly by the organism, and in some instances are values introjected or taken over from others, but perceived in distorted fashion,

11) As experiences occur in the life of the individual, they are either (a) symbolized, perceived into some relationship to the self, (b) ignored because there is no perceived relationship to the self-structure, (c) denied symbolization or given a distorted symbolization because the experience is inconsistent with the structure of the self.

12) Most of the ways of behaving which are adopted by the organism are those which are consistent with the concept of self.

13) Behaviour may, in some instances, be brought about by organic experiences and needs which have not been symbolized. Such behaviour may be inconsistent with the structure of the self, but in such instances the behaviour is not 'owned' by the individual. Psychological maladjustment exists when the organism denies to awareness significant sensory and visceral experiences, which consequently are not

14) Psychological maladjustment exists when the organism denies to awareness significant sensory and visceral experiences, which consequently are not symbolized and organized into the gestalt of the self-structure. When this situation exists, there is a basic or potential psychological tension.

15) Psychological adjustment exists when the concept of the self is such that all the sensory and visceral experiences of the organism are, or may be, assimilated on a symbolic level into a consistent relationship with the concept of self.

16) Any experience which is inconsistent with the organization or structure of self may be perceived as a threat, and the more of the perceptions there are, the more rigidly the self-structure is organized to maintain itself.

17) Under certain conditions, involving primarily complete absence of any threat to the self-structure, experiences which are inconsistent with it may be perceived, and examined, and the structure of self revised to assimilate and include such experiences.

18) When the individual perceives and accepts into one consistent and integrated system all his sensory and visceral experiences, then he is necessarily more understanding of others and is more accepting of others as separate individuals.

19) As the individual perceives and accepts into his self-structure more of his organic experiences, he finds that he is replacing his present value system - based so largely upon introjections which have been distortedly symbolized - with a continuing organismic valuing process.

Rogers was always very aware of the need to formulate and test hypotheses about human functioning. In *Social Behaviour and Experience* Richard Stevens, writing about Rogers, puts it this way:

*'Ideally, however, we need to go further and to test formally the how far they hold up and rule out the possibility of any bias arising from the fact that his theory has been generated largely by experience of people in therapy. Rogers and his co-workers are well aware of this need and have made many attempts to test specific hypotheses based on his ideas . . . What is notable about Roger's approach is his breadth. He is aware not only of the need to ground his theory in intimate interaction with people but also of the need to formulate propositions precisely and to test them where at all possible. In other words, he tries to attain a constant interplay between detailed observation, therapeutic practice, theory construction and hypothesis testing.'*

Hedy Brown & Richard Stevens (eds) *Social Behaviour and experience*. OU Press. 1975.

Roger's emphasis on research to test hypotheses and techniques within the human potential movement is illustrated in his book (again of the same name) on *Encounter Groups*, for which he used a psychological rating scale which he had developed at the University of Wisconsin with R.A.Rablen which they called 'A scale of process in Psychotherapy'. This was a six part scale of behaviour ranging from 'First Stage. Communication is about externals. There is an unwillingness to communicate self. Feelings and personal meanings are neither recognised

as such, or owned . . .' Up to the sixth stage - 'Feelings previously denied are now experienced with both immediacy and acceptance. . .this experience is often vivid, dramatic and releasing for the individual

In one research project using this scale eight individuals were filmed during a sixteen-hour week-end group and two minute filmclips from each person and each stage of the session were rated by thirteen independent judges. It was found that each of these individuals had progressed up the scale - some by a full two stages, that is from, for example the third stage - 'much 'description' of feelings and personal meanings which are not now present. These distant feelings are often pictured as unacceptable or bad. The experiencing of situations is largely described as occurring in the past'. to the fifth stage - 'Many feelings are fully expressed in the moment of their occurrence and are thus experienced in the immediate present. Those feelings are owned or accepted. Feelings previously denied now tend to bubble through into awareness . . .'

(Meador 'An analysis of basic encounter groups' Unpubl.Ph.D dissertation. United States Internal University.69)

Concerned by rumours of damage sustained by people in encounter groups Rogers made a systematic follow-up of more than 500 people who had been in groups he had run or been responsible for. Of the 481 who responded, two only had found the experience damaging in some way, some had experienced change that had not lasted, some had been neutral, but the overwhelming majority had felt that it had been constructive in its results, or had been a deeply meaningful experience which had made a continuing and positive difference to their behaviour.

Education is another field where Carl Roger's person centred philosophy is extremely relevant and important . Here he contrasted the traditional teacher-centred imparting of information to passive students with the pupil-centred system in which pupils are actively learning and using the teacher as a resource and a provider of resources.

*'When the toddler touches the warm radiator he learns for himself the meaning of a word, "hot"; he has learned a future caution in regard to all similar radiators; and he has taken in these learnings in a significant involved way which will not soon be forgotten. Likewise the child who has memorized "two plus two equals four" may one day in his play with blocks or marbles suddenly realize, "Two and two do make four!" He has discovered something significant for himself, in a way which involves both his thoughts and his feelings. Or the child who has laboriously acquired "reading skills" is caught up one day in a printed story, whether a comic book or an adventure tale, and realizes that words can have a magic power which lifts him out of himself into another world. He has now "really" learned to read.'*

Rogers. Freedom to Learn. Merrill.1969.

Again Rogers stresses the importance - for both pupil and teacher - of being in the moment, aware of his/her feelings and responses to others and to the subject matter of the lesson. He advocates the use of encounter groups, for the students, for the teachers and also for the parents. Rogers' intensely **personal** way of being in the world is of tremendous importance in the school setting where values, behaviour patterns and attitudes are being acquired - often for life. It is essential for the future outcome of our civilization that these values should include the ability to be aware of and to trust one's own feelings.

The concept of 'values' crops up repeatedly in Rogers' work and writings. Identification of values; definitions of values; re-examination of values. A memo to his class at California Western University started like this -

*'Values in Human Behaviour (Including Sensitivity Training) ! Wow! What a title for a course. To me it seems to be an opportunity to do anything that we wish which will add significantly to our own learning. It gives an opportunity for each of us to read about and think about such things as these: personal values as they relate to the meaning that one perceives in life; the values one regards as significant in one's personal behavior; values as related to sexual and family behavior; values in interpersonal relationships; values as they relate to the philosophy and practice of the behavioral sciences, special value problems such as prejudice, ethnic attitudes and the like. . . .'*

(ibid)

Values come from the cerebral and philosophical aspects of Rogers' work. The sense of loving awareness of self and other from a side that is both mystical and practical. There is a Zen exercise that seems to be a completely practical way of developing this particular sense of awareness. The student in turns concentrates his/her attention inside the self and then on the outside world. After some time s/he tries to combine both - an awareness of the inner self and the outer world at the same time. This would seem to be the perfect way of being as a Rogerian therapist. And it is then that the process can really work.

*' . . .the client moves from the experiencing of himself as an unworthy, unacceptable, and unlovable person to the realization that he is accepted, respected, and loved, in this limited relationship with the therapist. "Loved" has here perhaps its deepest and most general meaning - that of being deeply understood and deeply accepted.'*

( Client Centred Therapy.)

This way of relating is seen not only as a therapeutic technique but as a fundamental human need - both for client and for therapist.

*' . . .the need for a very elemental kind of response from people;*

*a response which is composed mainly of a fundamental penetrating warmth; a response which is simple and yet absolute, and certainly unqualified. It is a response that I feel can not be conveyed with words. It exists almost as a form of pure energy which can be picked up by another person only through his feelings, rather than through his intellect. . .'*

(ibid)

Again he beautifully combines a spiritual dimension with a very practical, real-life, human application. It is not surprising that one of Carl Rogers' favourite quotations is from Lao Tzu

' 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 approve themselves,  
If I keep from imposing on people,  
they become themselves.

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