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Healing Within and Healing Between

Abstract: The person-centred approach to human relationships developed by Carl Rogers offers a wide spectrum of understanding of the nature and processes of healing, both of the person in their relationship to themselves, and between persons. This extends to the relationships between groups, tribes and nations, and, in more recent developments, with other species and indeed the planet. In this paper I will explore these perspectives, in that order, and draw upon a spiritual perspective on healing, wholeness and integration. In relation to the harm that can be done by humans to other humans, dehumanization of the other is a primary form of violence, and in many senses a precondition for such treatment. It is significant that Rogers' second major work is entitled *On Becoming a Person*, and describes the opposite process, of becoming more human. Again, recent developments of the approach extend what might be described as person-alization to include other species and the planet. In one sense, the healing of the wounds of dehumanization is a corporate and political exercise, and in this paper, I suggest that the causes of such abuse need to be addressed simultaneously at the macro and micro levels—and everything in between. However, all such measures rest upon an understanding of the essential, or core, conditions for healthy relationships.

Keywords: Person-centred approach, core conditions of a therapeutic relationship, empathy, acceptance, congruence, personhood, wholeness, integration, individuation, healing, introjection, projection, Rogers, Jung.

Introduction

In this paper I will seek to address the nature of dehumanization from a psychological perspective, and in particular from the perspective of the person-centred approach to counselling and psychotherapy, to which I have been committed for

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the past 45 years. Perhaps more importantly I will also seek to explore how this approach can heal the wounds of dehumanization, both for individuals and collectively for communities, cultures and societies. The title refers to the possibility of individual healing, within oneself, and to the healing of relationships between persons, groups and communities.

From a psychological perspective, *dehumanization* is caused by a spectrum of factors from *introjection* through to *trauma*. Individuals, families, communities, societies and cultures inculcate their values and beliefs into children and young people in particular, and introjection is the process whereby individuals absorb values and beliefs *even when they are in conflict with the individual's own inner sense of value*. The process occurs because of disparities of power and control, and is particularly seen in children because of their need and willingness to trust their significant others. In one sense any extent of dehumanization is traumatic, and all people are subject to introjection, so all are dehumanized to some extent. But of course we use the latter term usually to refer to the more extreme and abusive situations. We shall explain introjection in greater depth later, but first let us develop an understanding of the person-centred approach.

The Person-centered Approach

The key to understanding the person-centred approach is that it rests upon a radically egalitarian relationship between the practitioner and the client or person seeking help, and in the group context between the facilitator/s and the other members of the group. The counsellor in the one-to-one context does not seek to know-for or know-better than the other person, and the facilitator in the group does not “lead” in any direct sense. In both cases the practitioner is seeking to be present to the other/s in an authentic, empathic and acceptant way, and trusting that this is the most helpful s/he can be to them. This rests upon a primary understanding that each person is a developing organism with, at their core, a capacity and urge to grow towards enhanced ways of being themselves, and that this growth will be most likely to occur in the climate of a conducive relationship, which is what the practitioner is seeking to provide or model.

Rogers himself had started from a more traditional “expert–patient” therapeutic model, and it was his frustration with the limited success of such an approach which led him to develop, with others, a less directive and less didactic approach. Initially, he came to recognize the value of pure listening, and he then explored and established the relational attitudes which gave the recipient the sense of being listened to attentively, receptively and at depth. These attitudes on the part of the listener amounted to three “core conditions”

of the helping relationship: empathy, acceptance and genuineness on the part of the helper. Empathy conveyed that the listener sensitively understood how the other person *felt* in what they were saying about how they experienced their lives. Acceptance conveyed that the listener could receive the other person just as they were, with complete respect and valuing for who they were as a person. Genuineness on the part of the listener ensured that the other two attitudes were trustworthy, real and not a professional posture or facade, and made the relationship a real meeting between real persons.

Rogers claimed that this “trinity” of conditions is both *necessary* and *sufficient* for positive therapeutic benefit.¹ Each of the three complements the other two and is necessary for their effectiveness. The *relational climate* of the conditions enables the recipient to feel deeply understood and respected, and to trust that the relationship is one of utmost integrity. All of this then creates a psychological environment where the client can develop their capacity to listen to and accept themselves in these ways. When the fear of criticism or judgement is removed, and a climate of empathy and acceptance is established, the individual becomes more free to acknowledge to themselves, and to the other, their feelings and attitudes, including those of which they are afraid or ashamed, and those which have been “buried” and denied to awareness. New and beneficial growth and learning can then occur. At times, this new learning can emerge with a transformative or revelatory quality.

In a therapeutic group a similar process can occur, but here the opportunities for empathic and acceptant response are shared between more members of the group, and have an enhanced quality of solidarity and support. Rogers explored and wrote about this *group process* and was deeply impressed by it.² Just as with one-to-one counselling, in groups the sense of relatedness can at times intensify and transcend usual boundaries and “healing energies are released”.³

Dehumanization and Re-humanization

In the context of dehumanization it is perhaps worth noting that the book that took Rogers beyond the specialized readership of therapeutic counselling and into wider public attention was called *On Becoming a Person*, and only subtitled

1 Rogers (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change; Rogers (1959). A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centred framework.

2 Rogers (1970). *Carl Rogers on encounter groups*.

3 Kirschenbaum (2007). *The life and work of Carl Rogers*.

A therapist's view of psychotherapy.⁴ Although the subtitle still refers to the specific field of psychotherapy, Rogers had reached a stage of expanding his understanding beyond the consulting room and into the whole range of human activity and interaction, including education, organizational management, family life and relationships. But this expansion of application was focused on a single word, *person*, and the process of becoming a person, and as such was therefore of universal application. It could also have been termed “becoming human” as it encompassed the very process and potential of human existence and the directional life force within each person (and, wider, each creature).

Rogers' approach rested upon a belief that every human being is “well-made” and endowed with an *actualising tendency*⁵ to grow towards the optimal realization of their potential. There are many factors which can mar and impede this potential progress (“dehumanize” or depersonalize), and these negative impacts can be addressed by a therapeutic relationship which best embodies the relational qualities by which the person can rediscover their *organismic integrity* and the trustworthiness of their basic nature, and grow in this connectedness and its outworking in relationships and life.

That is the hoped for process and outcome, but to understand more about how it may take place we must explore how a human being can become impaired in their (original) wholeness of being. It is difficult to make claims about when the human being becomes a person. There is genetic inheritance and there is prenatal experience in the womb. Thus it seems that the newborn child is not a *tabula rasa*, but may well inherit certain tendencies or dispositions, and may have been affected by external factors such as the mother's emotional and physical state during pregnancy. Many parents suggest that their offspring start life as a highly distinctive and unique *person*. Nurture or the lack of it progressively affects the development of each person, together with a gradually expanding range of external conditions, relationships and environmental factors. There are a number of well-established theories of child development which suggest identifiable stages in this process.

From the psychological perspective we acknowledge that those termed *significant others* have the greatest influence: mothers, fathers, siblings, other family members, and then as the child grows a gradually widening circle of other agents such as teachers, peer group, other authority figures and role models.

In person-centred theory the crucial factors that can impede the organic development of the young person occur when there is a conflict between the

⁴ Rogers (1961). *On becoming a person*.

⁵ Rogers (1959), p. 196.

child's internal valuing system and the external expectations of significant others. For example, a child falls over and hurts themselves, and their natural inclination is to cry and seek to be comforted. But in some cases the response of others may be unsympathetic: "Don't be a cry-baby!", "Pull yourself together!", "It isn't that bad", "Clumsy", "Idiot" or (gender-based) "Boys don't cry!"

This is a very simple example, but it serves to illustrate the tension which can then arise between "I feel upset" and the message "I shouldn't feel upset" (or at least shouldn't show that I'm upset). The hurt response can then become hidden or over time suppressed even from the subject's awareness. This latter eventuality is termed *introjection*, which is to say that an attitude or value which was initially at variance with the individual's authentic response can come to override or replace that response and be adopted and assimilated as if it is the authentic response or attitude. But the initial and truly authentic response does not disappear altogether; it can persist as an unconscious prompting and emerge as a tension or anxiety in the person: real and persistent but unattributable to its cause because it has become unavailable to awareness until or unless the connection is (re-) made and re-integration or healing is achieved. Because psychotherapy is attentive to the deeper levels of how the person actually feels, there is more likelihood that the inadmissible feelings, or at first only their vague echoes, may gradually become available to consciousness and exploration.

Social Context

This discussion has so far focused on individual development and the influence of significant others, but there is also another version of the effect on a person's development from the wider culture. We grow in a social and cultural environment which inculcates certain values and attitudes, and not others. These can range widely over ideas about how to be an acceptable man or woman, what constitutes success, how to be an acceptable member of a family, group or the community, and attitudes to other social groups and categories. The most central concept is *kinship* in its widest sense: to whom do we feel *akin* and towards whom are we *kind*; conversely, who is *other* or *alien*.

It seems that throughout human affairs, the capacity to dominate, dispossess and enslave other groups or peoples relies upon viewing these other groups as truly *other*, not like us, and inferior or inadequate. In a sense it seems that exploitation would feel "wrong" if the groups so treated were seen as like the exploiters, and conversely the perspective of inferiority justifies the exploitation "because they deserve no better", or even because "it will improve them".

It is imperative that the human race learns to recognize that we are *all* kin, of the same human family, diverse but related, and all equally deserving of care and respect. Attitudes of suspicion, hostility and prejudice are usually historically derived and often inculcated in childhood by families and community, and nationally by media and education. At the time of writing it is cruelly and frighteningly evident that history lives on until or unless it is addressed effectively. Harmful attitudes can be changed by social policies, legal efforts and education, but they are often deeply rooted, and these important approaches need to work at deeper levels too. In my experience, group experiences such as those of the person-centred approach can enable encounter and change at these deeper levels. The approach of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa shares some of these characteristics, requiring honesty and truth-telling as a means of healing.

Kinship Beyond the Human?

If we acknowledge the urgent challenge for nations and ethnic and religious groups to transcend difference and find common cause in the name of peacemaking and reconciliation, an equally challenging crisis regards our occupation of the planet, which can be seen to arise from not dissimilar divisions and require related solutions. What I mean is that there are many in the environmental field who are inviting us to go beyond species distinctions and accord our fellow creatures an attitude of respect and care equivalent to those we offer to our kin, our “own kind”, and this requires that we see ourselves as related through the gifts of life and consciousness to other species and indeed to all that exists, and that ruthless exploitation and destructiveness will not do, either as valid relatedness or for our own shared survival. I have written elsewhere⁶ about the blessings and curse of the developments of our scientific and technological understanding and abilities. They enable us to reach into space and into sub-atomic phenomena and develop technologies of tremendous and terrifying potential, but there has been a cost that the Earth is struggling to bear.

Human beings are derived from the stuff of the universe, and they are of the planet. For so much of the time we have existed here we have lived lives in close relationship with our natural environment. It is only in the last few hundred years that we have achieved a global dominance over the world and its creatures, and

⁶ Leonardi & Reader (Eds) (2025). *Environmental spirituality & wellbeing: Integrating social and therapeutic practice*.

exploited its resources and our fellow species as if they were all only for our use and in no need of care and protection from harmful treatment. In the collection of writing to which I refer there are a number of coherent themes which emerge about this crisis, and these amount to a diagnosis that human beings have lost touch with our creaturely origins and are to that extent alienated from the natural world and even our own bodies.⁷ One suggested remedy is re-education and therapy to restore our connectedness with our world and its life forms.

In both cases that of our relationships with other ‘kinds’ of people, and with other species, the need and challenge is to honour our deeper sense of connectedness and kinship, and to transcend the limitations of tribalism and speciesism, let alone racialism and scapegoating.

Healing Within

In a real sense this returns us to the person-centred approach to individual counselling and psychotherapy, which aims to restore the person to a deep sense of connectedness with themselves and their felt sense of value: *the organismic valuing process*.⁸ Again, it is no accident that the technical term being used here—*organismic* – directs us beyond the purely rational intellect and towards our whole integral existence as an organism, for as well as intellect, we have sensory, intuitive, spiritual, imaginative and empathic abilities, and—as if we need to be reminded—we are *physical* beings. When we feel and believe ourselves to be connected to our world, and indeed the universe, we become more inclined towards an attitude of reverence and respect towards it, and less inclined to act oppressively and destructively.

Who are we Really?

If we quote Bob Dylan, we are *multitudes*, (“I Contain Multitudes”, *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, 2020), or Joni Mitchell, we are *stardust* (“Woodstock”, *Ladies of the Canyon*, 1970), each of these contains a truth about the many parts of our personalities and about our organic carbon composition that relates us to the material universe, as above.

⁷ Leonardi (2020). Made in the image: The Christian understanding of the body.

⁸ Rogers (1959), pp. 210.

In person-centred theory there are two very different understandings of the “self”. One is the *self-concept*: the “story” we tell ourselves about who we are, the attitudes, values, memories and experiences we hold and of which we are consciously aware. “I am British/aged xx/living in xxx/work as a xxx/have/don’t have x children/believe/don’t believe in xxx/value this and not that, etc. In its way, although it evolves and changes over time, the self-concept is pretty consistent in most of its content at any given time. This means that we experience challenge and even threat if we are confronted by events and experiences which are at variance with it: “I’m not that kind of person”.

At an earlier point in this chapter we discussed the process of *introjection*, whereby we adopt values and attitudes which were in some way imposed upon us by external agents. The self-concept is a potential battleground for the conflict between these introjected values and our deeper instincts. One person I worked with as a counsellor had loved to dance and paint when she was young. When she became an adult she adopted a somewhat puritanical value system by which such activities were judged to be indulgent and frivolous, or worse, and she abandoned them. Now in her 60s she was subject to extended periods of depression. I think the connection is clear.

Rogers’ concept of the self,⁹ as opposed to the self-concept, was less focused on self as content in terms of ideas and history, and more simply as the locus of awareness of the flow of experience and response to it: “I am who I am becoming, moment by moment, an experiencing and experiential self, not a fixity of concept and structure.” In this understanding of self, there is more scope for adaptation and change, and less fear of an existential challenge posed by life events and choices. In this view, the process of therapy is away from a rigid self-concept which resists change and seeks to be in control, and towards an openness and fluidity of self which embraces experience and change, and learns from it.¹⁰

Jung: Individuation, the Shadow and Projection

If we shift from a person-centred to a Jungian theoretical framework we find a comparable perspective. In Jungian psychology, aspects of the self which are contrary to the accepted values of the individual and their social context are liable to be denied to awareness, repressed and “buried” in the personal unconscious, forming part of what he termed the *shadow self* as *complexes*. These impulses,

⁹ Rogers (1959), pp. 200.

¹⁰ Rogers (1961), pp. 155–157.

needs and desires do not cease to exist and cause effects, but they are “invisible” in themselves, and therefore unavailable to awareness, being unconscious. For Jung, the work of *individuation* was the proper task of adult maturity,¹¹ whereby the individual seeks to make conscious their repressed or shadow side and seek to integrate it into their whole self in “the tension of opposites” and in a conscious and not destructive fashion. The process may still be challenging and uncomfortable, but highly worthwhile. The refusal to engage in such work is the greater danger, for individuals and societies.¹²

The dangerous corollary of the denied and repressed shadow is that it may emerge as psychological projection, whereby the “respectable” person views those they deem “unrespectable” with a disapproval energized out of all proportion by that very same repressed energy in themselves. “Witch hunts” would be one example of this kind of phenomenon at a local and national level. In such a situation, the person/s judging the other/s actually perceives the other/s as bearing the traits and behaviours which the judging person/s have repressed from consciousness in themselves. Another example, again from Christian history, would be the identification of the female person as a “temptress”, which inappropriately loads all the responsibility for male desire onto the female. In all these cases the repression and projection are unconscious by definition, and the judging person/s feel confident about their grounds for condemning or oppressing the other/s.

When psychological projection meets with introjection we have a mechanism for oppression, or to use our focal term, *dehumanization*, both outer and inner, especially where real disparities in power between oppressor and oppressed are involved. By this I mean that not only is the person/s in power able to physically dominate, exploit, oppress or condemn the other/s, but that the other/s may internalize—introject—the judgement and attitude of those in power and to some extent believe it for/of themselves, or at least fear that it may be true to some extent. An example of this would be a victim of abuse who feels or fears that they were somehow responsible for it occurring. At a group level, an oppressed group which is treated as if it is inferior may in some ways come to believe it too. *Gaslighting* is a contemporary term for the process whereby an abusive person or persons may undermine the natural objections and self-belief of their victim/s.

11 Cf. Rogers (1961).

12 The Jungian Aion. (2024, September 18). *The way of the dream* [Video].

The Remedy?

If we accept that such mechanisms and processes occur, then we must also ask how they might be addressed. The answers are complex and ongoing areas of debate and exploration, but the thesis of this chapter is that the understandings and experience of the person-centred approach offer an effective and credible means, among others, for doing so. Just as the damage—introjection, dehumanization—may be done by significant others at an immediate and/or more diffuse cultural level, so too the healing may be achieved at a personal and relational level, and at a cultural level. But in essence the suggestion is this: that in a trustworthy relationship characterized by genuine empathy and deep acceptance, a person or persons may be enabled to access progressively deeper levels of themselves and gradually achieve healing and liberation from the harmful attitudes and experiences which have wounded them in the past and whose effects continue into the present. Below I will describe examples that demonstrate such processes at work.

An Example of the Person-centred Approach

Rogers was pioneering in many ways, and not just in the radical emphases of his theory and practice. He was a thoroughgoing empiricist and the first to initiate detailed research into both the process and outcomes of therapy, including recording whole sessions of therapy, initially in audio and later on video. Thus researchers, practitioners, students and trainees could “taste and see” the method in its living process and subject it to analysis and critique. One of Rogers’ video recordings was entitled *Carl Rogers counsels an individual: “Right to be desperate” and “On anger and hurt”*.¹³ It is a recording of two one-to-one therapy sessions a day apart. The (unnamed) person was of black American ethnicity and currently in remission from leukaemia; he was also recently divorced from his wife, an American white woman, and living away from her and their children. The title of the video of the first session is taken from the client saying that in all the distress of his illness and divorce he had not found anyone who “allowed him to be desperate”.¹⁴

¹³ Person-Centred Approach Videos. (2021, January 3). Carl Rogers Counsels an Individual on Hurt and Angers (1977) Parts 1 & 2 [Video]; Person-Centred Approach Videos. (2021, January 3). Carl Rogers The Right to Be Desperate (1977) Parts 1 & 2 [Video].

¹⁴ Clarke & Goldman (2004). Summary of ‘The Right to be Desperate’ (p. 2).

He describes how he was given one year to live and then at a later point just four weeks. The breakup with his wife, and subsequent divorce, took place during this period and added to it being a very dark time. He had moved to the west coast in a bid to find some benefit and a way forward, and this seemed to have helped because he was now in remission. Doing things that were good for him, like playing tennis, seemed just as therapeutic—if not more so—than further medical treatment.¹⁵ In a way this strand of personal well-being turns out to be representative of a bigger dimension of his emerging understanding of the process he has lived through (and nearly died of), and this emerges in an organic and unstructured way through much of the rest of the session.

It would be better for the reader to watch the videos unfold than to be given any one person's summary and analysis, but short of providing a transcript I can only offer the latter here. In essence, he is coming to a recognition that he has suppressed his real identity from around the age of seven by becoming a high achiever and "a credit to his race".¹⁶ This phrase, "a credit to his race", recurs with angry and difficult feelings for him throughout the session. It is perhaps easy to imagine how he found the rewards of praise and somewhat acceptance very attractive as a child and later, but now he is coming to see that he has paid too high a price in terms of his own sense of self and fidelity to himself:

Because, you know, in being a credit to your race in being an outstanding student and an outstanding scholar, an outstanding football player, whatever, leaves you little room to be.

In essence he comes to understand that he has bought into the prevailing white culture which rewards him for his achievements but without offering him genuine acceptance as a black person. It turns out that he experienced a revelation of this process much closer to home when his marriage entered the time of difficulty and he found that for all the previous apparent love and acceptance from her family, which he had believed and genuinely reciprocated, "all of a sudden I became just another nigger".¹⁷

In essence he is coming to the recognition that he has imbibed and internalized attitudes and beliefs which were harmful to him, and he believes his illness is a consequence of it. He acknowledges that during this difficult time he has lied and manipulated people because he needed money to live, and for his treatment, and that this deceit has felt worse to him than the illness itself. In a way this is another level of the recognition that being untrue to himself—

¹⁵ Clarke & Goldman (2004), p. 6.

¹⁶ Clarke & Goldman (2004), p. 1.

¹⁷ Clarke & Goldman (2004), p. 2.

even more than to others—has been harmful to him. Earlier we noted that the client marked the age of seven as the turning point in his adoption of external values. He refers to a time when he felt he could remove himself from the outside world, “concentrating on what I wanted to do and what I wanted to be”, but that that sense of self had got lost. Now he feels he has a chance to reclaim that sense for himself. As the first session draws to a close he makes a kind of summary statement of where he has reached:

I think I really want to say that I want to be comfortable in saying that ... I got raked over the coals and I resent it, I am mad and I am angry and I need to get that to be angry ... I was really screwed by a lot of people and I have reason to be angry.¹⁸

But he also acknowledges that he hasn’t felt able to be that angry or to express it to others yet. One hint as to the restraints he feels around anger is that it wouldn’t be “civilized”, which is in itself a precursor to much of the content of the second session.

The second session a day later continues the development of his awareness that he has a great deal of unexpressed anger about his treatment by others and in the wider culture where “he should not be angry because militancy is disapproved of”.¹⁹ He can name it but confesses that it is very difficult for him to fully engage with it and express it. For example, at one point he clearly feels the temptation to swear expressively using obscenity, “calling someone a bad name”,²⁰ but again draws back from doing so because “I was raised properly”.²¹ In this interview, Rogers assures him that it’s okay with him for him to be angry, and he queries that as if he can’t quite believe it, and Rogers emphasizes that it is okay with him “Damn right!”.²²

At this point in the interview the client pauses reflectively for 27 seconds, a long pause in a live interview, sighs and says that maybe the problem is not just with expressing the anger but with getting in touch with the hurt that underlies it, and with the cause of it, and that in turn requires showing somebody that he is hurt and “how can I trust that to somebody?”.²³ He reflects back to the previous interview and that he would have liked to say that he “got screwed over ... and

¹⁸ Clarke & Goldman (2004), p. 8.

¹⁹ Brink & Rosenzweig (2004). Summary of ‘On Anger and Hurt’ (p. 10).

²⁰ Brink & Rosenzweig (2004), p. 13.

²¹ Brink & Rosenzweig (2004), p. 14.

²² Brink & Rosenzweig (2004), p. 11.

²³ Brink & Rosenzweig (2004), p. 11.

hurt” but that he was reluctant to say that because it meant he felt he was a victim and “that they got the best of me”.²⁴

He then makes crucial connections with his reluctance to cry in front of others because he had been trained to believe that “men don’t cry”.²⁵ He wishes he could have told his ex-wife’s family how hurt he felt by them, but they wouldn’t have understood because “they see black people as not being human”.²⁶

There is a profound illustration throughout these interviews of the power of introjected values to divert a person from their genuine feelings and instincts, and that this process involves an alienation of the person from their true selves, which can incur a heavy cost psychologically and indeed physically, and that this amounts to dehumanization: black people being seen and treated “as not being human”, as we have seen.

In the remainder of the interview the client continues to go deeper into his sense of hurt and damage, and to assert his intention that doing so is a significant step towards reaffirming “the fact that I am a person”,²⁷ which is a very clear statement of his recognition of and commitment to his personal re-humanization project. Towards the end of the interview he suggests that he has gone as far as he can into the anger and pain for the present, and they agree to stop there.

Commentary

I have already suggested that this summary and analysis of two therapy sessions is very limited in its capacity to convey the therapeutic process as such. My account is almost entirely about the client’s process and gives very little sense of how Rogers actually facilitated that process, which a full transcript can better achieve and the video recordings even more so, but even then there are limitations, as well expressed by Maria Villas-Boas Bowen, about written transcripts, which are valuable but lack key aspects:

In Carl Rogers case, transcripts fail to convey the incredible quality of his presence, which he expressed through his eyes, posture and tone of voice ... Often it was not what he said or did that made the difference, but how he said it and his way of being with the client.²⁸

²⁴ Brink & Rosenzweig (2004), p. 11.

²⁵ Brink & Rosenzweig (2004), p. 12.

²⁶ Brink & Rosenzweig (2004), p. 12.

²⁷ Brink & Rosenzweig (2004), p. 15.

²⁸ Bowen (1996). Foreword.

In relation to Bowen's words here, it is of interest that Rogers' last major work was entitled *A Way of Being*.²⁹ As we have suggested, the videos improve on these limitations to an extent, but a single camera image can only show at best one of the participants at a time, and not the focus of each other's eyes on the other, or the feeling and sense of presence between them, as Bowen remarks.

What the videos do offer is a unique insight into this therapy, as practised by one therapist with one client at a particular moment in time. Many watching will question particular therapist responses and think they would have responded differently or better. That is the vulnerability which Rogers entered into by offering himself to be filmed repeatedly in spontaneous and unscripted situations.

In particular, many questions have been raised about Rogers choosing not to acknowledge the racial differences between them, even when the client is talking about his unhappy experiences of racial discrimination and difficulty trusting another with his pain. This is in contrast with, for example, a later video of him with another African American client in 1985.³⁰ There is a point described earlier, however, when the client says that his ex-wife's family would not understand his hurt because "they see black people as not being human" (and which was pointed to as a statement of dehumanization), and Rogers responds that the client has opened up to him about his hurt (i.e. trusted him with it) to which the client responds "You know that I'm a person",³¹ which suggests just how much he feels related to humanly by Rogers in a re-humanising relationship. Rogers' own theory seems to have been that if a person can offer the core conditions of person-centred therapy and the client recognizes this quality of relationship, then this goes a long way towards overcoming any inequalities or other distinctions between them. Others take a different view, for example those quoted by Moodley.³²

²⁹ Rogers (1980). *A way of being*.

³⁰ Moodley, Lago, & Talahite (2004). *Carl Rogers counsels a black client: Race and culture in person-centred counselling* (p. xii and 22).

³¹ Moodley, Lago, & Talahite (2004), p. 13.

³² Moodley, Lago, & Talahite (2004), pp. 17–21.

Further Reflections on Anger, Hurt and Dehumanization

Another interesting video, *The Steel Shutter*, involves a mixed group of Northern Irish people drawn from both Catholic and Protestant communities.³³ Although this and the Rogers' videos are very different examples, in both cases individuals were able to move from entrenched pain and anger towards healing and reconciliation, within an individual in the first mentioned interview, and between individuals in the latter.

The process of healing may start from a recognition of anger and resentment at ill treatment, as can be seen in the Rogers' case study. Anger is a healthy response to hurt and the threat of harm. Often protesting minorities are criticized for being angry and thereby seen as "unreasonable" and "threatening". This is a double bind for the protesting people, because their authentic response—anger—is itself being used as a reason to criticize and devalue them and their protest. When an individual or group feels inhibited by those in authority from voicing their anger as part of their protest, this can drive them into more extreme behaviour, which is truly unacceptable but also a self-fulfilling "proof" that they are in the wrong. Where do they go from there? (The call to non-violent protest is the only approach which can avoid this danger, but it is easy to see how frustrating and even ineffectual this may seem for the oppressed group).

In person-centred individual counselling or groups, empathy and acceptance requires that the anger of a person or persons is heard and respected. Often when this is achieved the person/s will feel received and understood for the first time, and they may move to some of the feelings and experiences which underlie their anger, for example hurt, shame and fear. The key thing to recognize here is that anger is a "strong" feeling, whereas acknowledging hurt, shame or fear may feel far more vulnerable. A person who has already been hurt may be very reluctant to make themselves vulnerable to the possibility of further hurt. Such an opening up requires a deep sense of trust—and need.

Anger can be a powerful motivating energy to work for social action and justice, and the achievement of justice can be healing. There is another level of healing which comes about through being able to feel and process some of the impact of the distress, pain and hurt of injurious experience in a climate of compassion. Justice may be achieved in courts and parliaments and truth and reconciliation commissions, and by activism and campaigns. Personal healing

33 The Centre for the Study of the Person. (1998). *The steel shutter* [Video].

can occur in individual counselling, support groups and encounter groups. When emotional and psychological injury occurs there is a natural organismic response of shock and numbness, and a kind of distancing from the pain, which, like bereavement, may be too great for the person to encompass and process immediately. If the distress is singular and not repeated, the processing and healing may occur relatively soon after the event, given the right support. But if the harm is repeated and ongoing, the distress must in some sense be “bracketed” within the person simply to enable ordinary functioning. This is a survival measure, but it comes at a price. We may be talking about traumatic events, or simply the kind of everyday duress which can lead to the need to develop a “thick skin”. The trouble with a thick skin is that it dulls positive as well as negative experience.

With traumatic impacts there may develop what is now termed post-traumatic stress disorder as a sign of unfulfilled healing. At a lesser level, an emotional “thick skin” may simply be evident in irritability, impatience, restlessness and lower levels of empathy for others’ suffering. As an aside, it seems to me that we are more aware in these times of the need for support for those who have been exposed to disaster, war, conflict, etc, and provision for them may be made. When the distress is large scale and over time, for example in Britain and many other nations during and after the Second World War, the impact is so widespread as to affect virtually the whole population, and when everyone suffers it is hard to find extra resources of care: distress has become the norm or environment for everyone. It was noticeable that very many soldiers who returned from active service spoke very little about their traumatic experiences. Everyone “just got on with it” if they could and found some comfort in the resumption of normal life. But effects persist until addressed, and the wounds of history repeat themselves until they are engaged with and resolved.

We have examined the role of the personal unconscious and of the personal shadow in Jungian terms. Jung also postulated the existence of the “collective unconscious”, and the “collective shadow” of, for example, a culture or nation. The collective unconscious is the repository (language is difficult here) of the archetypes which operate unconsciously in all peoples over time. They may be culturally embodied but have a kind of universal application. The collective shadow is the store of repressed dynamics of a population or group, and which is what can erupt in persecutions, massacres and genocide. Such energies may be a combination of historical recriminations and of widespread prejudice against those who are defined as other, not our kind. The Rwanda genocide, the Holocaust, slavery and apartheid all tap into these energies and enable otherwise decent and kind people to treat defined others in despicable ways.

It may seem that in relation to the destructive tensions of our times, from the threat of climate disaster to conflicts between global superpowers, as well as smaller but no less threatening warfare and other conflict between and within nations, there is an understandable feeling of helplessness and powerlessness for the individual, and even for governments. It may be that the prescriptions offered in this chapter are far too slight and narrow to begin to address the predicaments we find ourselves confronting. Jung lived close to the mass hysteria and atrocities of Nazism, and in the last decades of his life was keenly alert to the dangers of such eruptions in other countries, and of international tensions. His counsel was to encourage the individual in their personal engagement with the process of individuation, and for them to engage as well as possible with their own unconscious life and shadow self.³⁴

Carl Rogers' Later Work

Rogers devoted the last decades of his long and productive life to disseminating the wisdom of the person-centred approach and extending its reach to encompass global issues and cross-cultural communication. From the early 1970s on he had a leading role in cross-cultural communication conferences, such as one I attended in Spain in 1978, which I will present as a second case study below. These workshops combined cross-cultural communication with conflict resolution in South Africa between white and black people, in Latin America between various oppressed groups and their oppressors, in Europe between East and West, and in Ireland between Catholics and Protestants.³⁵

Many of these workshops took place behind the then Iron Curtain and in emerging democracies, with a sub-text of enabling the latter tendency. There are impressive accounts of the positive impact of this work, both for the participants at the time and beyond.³⁶ For example, in relation to the last such international visit he made, to Russia in 1986, his daughter Natalie Rogers (also a therapist) reported that she had been told many times by Russians that her father's visit had "changed the face of psychology there".³⁷ It is worth reading transcripts of some of the live exchanges between participants, and between Rogers and partic-

³⁴ The Jungian Aion. (2024, September 18). *The way of the dream* [Video].

³⁵ Kirschenbaum (2007). *The life and work of Carl Rogers* (p. 495).

³⁶ Kirschenbaum (2007), p. 495.

³⁷ Kirschenbaum (2007), p. 522.

ipants, in these conferences and workshops to gain a sense of the liberating and transformative nature of what was experienced.³⁸

That was certainly my experience of the Spanish conference Rogers led at El Escorial in 1978. My memories of this conference are somewhat mixed in with those of many other comparable conferences and workshops I attended over the next few decades, but there are many reliable recollections of this one. At the beginning, the 200 participants and facilitators from 27 countries gathered in a conference room in multiple circles of chairs, with Rogers and the other facilitators distributed randomly around the room. One or more organizational announcements were made, and then Rogers welcomed everyone and said something about how he was glad to be there and that he was looking forward to engaging with us all as the conference progressed. His words were then translated into Spanish for the benefit of participants from the host nation. (It had been stated in the advance publicity that English and Spanish would be the two given languages of the conference.) Then he was silent, and the silence continued, and it became apparent that no one was going to take responsibility for the direction of the meeting from there on. Some of us had participated in person-centred groups before and were accustomed to the unstructured approach. For others it was new and very challenging. Even for seasoned participants it is never “comfortable” at this stage; there is a sense of nervous energy and some confusion.

Various individuals began to make contributions, often seemingly disconnected from each other; some more intellectual, others more personal. Designated facilitators introduced themselves or responded to what was said. Some tensions were expressed about the situation, the approach, the lack of direction, and facilitators were more likely to respond to the sense of unhappiness in the statement than to engage in theoretical discussion. But facilitators did not want to take—or give—a lead or intervene more often than anyone else, as if their responses were more significant or helpful than anyone else’s. The aim of this approach is for the whole community to take equal and shared responsibility for the direction and conduct of the meeting.

To add to the challenge there were linguistic issues. Spanish and English by no means satisfied the translation needs of the diverse assembly. The Spanish context provided an additional difficulty, because this was post-Franco Spain, and some of the Spanish participants were said to be “observers” and likely to be secret police. Could we create a climate of trust in those circumstances? At first there were professional translators employed to provide English and Spanish translation,

38 Kirschenbaum (2007), pp. 502–503.

but it was found that they were liable to modify and “sanitize” the content of the translated statements to avoid any sense of rancour or “impoliteness”, and they were soon dispensed with and replaced by informal translation by various participants into many more than the two initial languages. This slowed down the flow of communication but added the benefit of allowing longer attention and consideration for each contribution.

For some people, the lack of structure in these large (and small) group meetings was hugely frustrating and time and energy consuming. For others it was of the essence that the “structure” emerged through careful negotiation involving the expressed wishes and needs of as many members of the community as possible. In some similar conferences, the whole schedule of the conference was negotiable from the outset. In this one, a schedule was provided—but still negotiable—which included each day a whole-community meeting, “small” groups of around 20 participants, each with a couple of designated facilitators, and specific workshops and presentations. In the community meetings there would be individuals wanting to get on with expressing personal issues and those wanting to discuss theoretical and wider issues, and the tension would be between trying to respond well to these initially disparate needs. “How do we care for the individual *and* the collective?” This is a fundamental question for social systems, and it is easy to answer by having recourse to one or the other extreme; however, it is exquisitely and sometimes maddeningly hard to achieve both at the same time.

Unstructured large groups like these are each unique and different, but overall a similar pattern can emerge, which Rogers and others have described³⁹ and which a participant can observe. However, it is important to emphasize that—as with any other systematic analysis of phenomena—these are generalizations which may not apply in any one instance or may occur in a different order. In particular there is never, in one-to-one therapy or in groups like these, a guaranteed outcome. The facilitators and participants may all wish for and hope for a gradual process of achieving communication, understanding and connection, but it has to be worked for in every instance at every point and may indeed not occur at all. That has to be theoretically possible, but it has not been the case in my own experience. That said, it can be a very volatile and unpredictable process along the way. The paradox of this approach is that the positive outcomes may occur, but the facilitators must bring an openness to *any* outcome along the way and not seek to impose an agenda of their own on the proceedings. Only in this way will each questioning, angry, searching, yearning participant feel equally and openly heard and received.

³⁹ Rogers (1970), p. 22.

The Spanish conference enjoyed a very rich range of shared feelings and experience from such a large and varied group of participants, and there were many deeply moving times of a (very) large group achieving an almost miraculous quality of care and attentiveness to one person's communication. At such times there can be a sense that individual separateness has given way to a shared awareness and receptiveness, and that each person can be simultaneously uniquely individual and also a seamless part of a community of relationship.

Over the four decades that followed I have attended and participated in many comparable conferences of the person-centred approach. Many were memorable for the quality of cross-cultural communication as well as all the other riches of interpersonal relationships at depth: conferences in Holland, South Africa, the United States and Japan spring to mind for this aspect in particular. Rogers died in 1987 at the age of 85. The work of the person-centred approach has continued in America and worldwide with impressive vitality and openness to further development. In the United States, the Centre for the Study of the Person, based in California and founded by Rogers and a large group of colleagues, and the Association for the Development of the Person-centred approach, continue to organize annual conferences and training courses, and there are equivalent organizations in many countries, including the United Kingdom (The Person-Centred Association), other European countries, Mexico, Brazil and Japan. There are international forums for the person-centred approach, and a world association. The conferences organized by all these bodies resemble the El Escorial one described here, combining community meetings, small groups, workshops and presentations.

A Spiritual Perspective

Finally, I should like to reflect on these healing processes from a spiritual perspective. Individuals may feel loved and supported in all kinds of ways by those dear to them, but there can still be a certain extent of loneliness, even in loving relationships. Others may not have felt securely loved and have learned to survive without it. Many carry wounds which have not been healed. Rogers suggested that when a person experiences genuine empathy for themselves from another for the first time "they join the human race".⁴⁰ Certainly in my own experience the first time I recognized that I was being held in a relationship of unconditional acceptance was a transformative experience in this way, and its

⁴⁰ Rogers (1980), p. 10.

reverberations have continued over the rest of my life. As a result I seek to provide the conditions where others may feel, perhaps in some cases for the first time, received, respected and understood in the deep parts of themselves that they have kept hidden for fear of judgement.

Thus the resistances and blockages to personal growth which impair individuals and communities may be addressed by a therapeutic approach which depends upon fundamental qualities of relationships. Both Rogers and Jung started from the individual therapeutic relationship in the consulting room, and each of them widened the scope of their engagement to embrace and address social and international issues. Perhaps the universal wisdom in which they played a significant part is that it all starts with and evolves out of personal relationships, and healing both within and between. For Rogers “that which is universal is most personal”.⁴¹

If we ask for the spiritual perspective on these matters, there are two different perspectives: the implicit and the explicit. In my work I have argued that the person-centred approach has deep correlations with Christianity, for example, when the latter is viewed as the religion of divine incarnation and unconditional love; indeed I have suggested that the person-centred approach can be seen as “Christianity in action”.⁴²

In terms of explicit spirituality, both Rogers and Thorne (Thorne, B.J., 1991, 1999, 2012) have described times in therapy, both individual and group, when a quality which can only be described as spiritual is present. Rogers’ early negative experience of Christianity disposed him away from religion for the greater part of his life, but in his last decade especially he began to use terminology which would previously have eschewed: “transcendent”, “mystical”, “spiritual”. Being as we have suggested, a thoroughgoing empiricist, it was his experience which led him to these awarenesses:

When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or as a therapist.... When I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me.... Then whatever I do seems to be full of healing.... It seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present.⁴³

⁴¹ Cain (2002). Further thoughts about non-directiveness and client-centred therapy.

⁴² Leonardi (2006). Self-giving and self-actualising: Christianity and the person centred approach; Leonardi (2008). *Partners or adversaries: A study of Christian and person-centred approaches to spirituality and the implications for Christian Ministry and pastoral practice*; Leonardi (2016). Tenderness in person-centred therapy: A spiritual dimension.

⁴³ Rogers (1980), p. 129.

For Thorne, his experience of such moments also has a profoundly liberating and healing dimension:

Often too I have known clients, who, sensing the paradox at the very source of tenderness itself, have dared to own their love-hate and have discovered by doing so that they are able to quit the emotional prison in which they were paralyzed and impotent. (Thorne 2004, p12).

Such “liberation” could amount to re-humanization indeed. Both these quotations report aspects of the therapist or facilitator’s experience, but the emphasis is on the shared nature of the experience with the other/s and on the outcomes in terms of healing and liberation for them. In group experience especially the individuals have become “part of something larger”, with greatly beneficial outcomes. In developing a discipline and dedication to the consistent embodiment of the person-centred core conditions for a facilitative relationship, the practitioner invites their own and their client/s participation in an exercise in shared humanization.

In referring to spirituality and religion, I am aware that most of the major world religions, Christianity included, have a chequered history with regard to their treatment of those deemed to be “outside” the fold, or deviant from within, and have contributed to the dehumanization of many individuals and groups, sometimes in the name of “saving them” or “civilising them”. These behaviours are particularly prevalent when the religion concerned has a self-belief in its superiority over all others, and when the religion is allied to temporal power. The only saving grace in all this is that there have also been many religious teachers and leaders who have opposed these tendencies and challenged the systems of oppression and dehumanization, and pointed back to the essential teachings of their religions about compassion and justice. Examples include Martin Luther King in the context of racism in the United States, Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in apartheid South Africa.

In the Christian bible, Jesus’ teaching consistently encourages compassion for the poor and downtrodden, and he sets an example in reaching out across divisions of gender, race and religion. In terms of dehumanization, it damages, above all, the essence of being human. According to one of the early Christian teachers’ phrasing, “The glory of God is the human being fully alive” (Irenaeus). There could not be a more eloquent expression in affirming the divine vision of humanness and opposing anything which detracts from every human being’s “aliveness” and well-becoming.

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