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MEETING OF HUMANISTIC AND RELIGIOUS GOALS IN THEORY OF GROWTH ORIENTATION OF CARL ROGERS

It is natural for a humanist-existentialist and naturalist to assume the view that there is nothing seriously religious about the client-centred growth therapy of Carl Rogers (1902). Lack of a clearly articulated frame of reference for self-direction and the direction of others has been pointed out as one of the serious deficiencies of this system of growth-therapy. This paper is an attempt to see how far Roger's certain humanistic and therapeutic motifs could equally be religious in their tenor and orientation. If the reign of the demonic spirit is expelled at the deepest layer of the whole man, achieving that layer is certainly the reinstatement of the kingdom of God.¹

1. The Therapeutic Hopes

Christopher Lasch criticizing the contemporary narcissistic preoccupation with the self, writes: "Having no hope of improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves, that what matters is psychic food, taking self improvement, getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet, or belly-dancing immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to 'relate', overcoming the fear of pleasure."² He agrees that they are in themselves harmless, but when they turn out to be symbols of authenticity and genuineness, they become symptomatic of a deep rooted sickness in the psyche.

The contemporary growth therapies propose to touch and heal the man where he is most weak and severely wounded. According to Howard

1. Cf. Joel Kovel, *A Complete Guide to Therapy*. (New York : Pantheon Books, 1973), p. 115.

2. Christopher Lasch, *The Cultural of Narcissism*, (A Warner Communication Comp, 1979), p. 29.

Clinebell the basic assumption and goal of all counselling and psychotherapy is the maximizing of human wholeness and potentials.³

He writes: "The central task of counsellors, therapists, and growth oriented teachers is to awaken realizable hopes for creative change in persons and then to help them actualize these hopes."⁴ Hopes are ultimately based upon, and conditioned by ideologies. One of the assumptions of Joel Kovel is that therapeutism necessarily involves ideology and is based on real practice.⁵ He distrusts dramatic cures and therapeutic breakthroughs. The various short-term counselling methods appear as means for enabling people to handle life crises growthfully. Some may seek a overhauling of the present sick society to achieve this goal. It is to distract, from a therapeutic point of view, the psychic energy from where it is most needed, namely the individual realm for no one could expect to work out an ideal society within the framework of a time-bound programme. As to the kind of ideology which could be operative in the context of counselling and therapy Joel Kovel writes: "For it seems to me that, given the nature of psyche and present social relations and scientific advancement, a certain amount of neurosis is inevitable, and any therapy that tries to short circuit this truth is baying at the moon. In contrast, a modestly held therapeutic goal, rationally and ethically applied, can do more real good for the individual - and leave the way open for authentic social action."⁶

2. Schools of Therapy

Today we come across with a number of therapeutic approaches to the various forms of emotional difficulties in the English-speaking countries, especially in the United States. It is on the assumption that there is a cause-effect relationship between thought, emotion, action and behaviour that most of the therapeutic techniques try to identify the ideologies (thought or memories) which shape and modify the emotional life of a man who seeks help in his personal distress. The art of helping people to actualize their hopes or ideologies is the common therapeutic goal of all therapies. On the basis of the implicit or articulated frame of

3. Howard Clinebell, *Contemporary Growth Therapies*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), p. 15.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

5. Joel Kovel *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

6. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

reference with which a counsellor encounters a counsellee, Howard Clinebell speaks of five streams of psychotherapy. He looks at them from the perspective of growth counselling. It makes certain assumptions of principles such as the following :

- 1) People need to develop their unused gifts in the six interdependent dimensions of their lives – in their bodies and minds, their relationships with other people, nature, institutions, and God. Genuine happiness is a by-product of continuing potentialization in these six dimensions.
- 2) The growth drive is diminished in many persons by a variety of factors including emotional malnutrition, toxic relationships, economic deprivation, social oppression, and their own fear of and resistance to growth.
- 3) Adequate physical wholeness is a valuable foundation for full development of the other five dimensions.
- 4) Wholeness is a lifelong journey of becoming.
- 5) Spiritual growth, the enhancement of one's values, meanings, "peak experience," and relationship with God, is central to whole-person growth."⁷

These principles refer to the philosophy of therapist who has a rather explicit religious orientation. Even from the point of view of mere humanist principles of man's wholeness, the religious value of it cannot be derived. No one approach available today seems to have all the therapeutic answers. The various therapies such as those modeled on psychoanalytic-insight and others make their own specific contribution to the field of growth-counselling. As indicated above in this paper I shall deal with the spiritual or holistic growth therapy of Carl Roger's which regard spiritual growth as central and essential in all healing and growth.

3. Religious features of Rogerian therapy

(i) Carl Rogers (born in 1902 in Illinois) had an early education in fundamentalist Christian tradition. As he interacted with people of different cultures his fundamentalist beliefs gradually weakened. During his theological studies at Union Theological Seminary his doubts about his religious commitment increased and so he shifted his studies to educational psychology in New York, Columbia University. His purely humanistic view of education can be defined as follows: "Person-centred education derives from person-centred personality theory and client-centred psychotherapy.

7. Howard Clinbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 17.

It views the individual as an organized whole that naturally moves toward's an optimal level of development. Teachers are regarded as facilitators of a students' self-determined and self-initiated growth and quest for knowledge. Because behaviour is believed to be a function of a person's unique perceptions, the person-centred educator best facilitates growth by becoming aware of the individual's frame of reference and consistently offering acceptance, understanding and empathy."⁸

While education aims at preparing youth to become productive and independent members of society in the context of an academic institution, counselling tries to achieve the same goal without restricting itself to people of any age bracket or mode of instruction or training. In short, it serves to transmit the knowledge, traditions and beliefs underlying one's cultural heritage so that one could direct himself in his life - affairs. The person centered education and counselling has its roots in all religious traditions. The Indian upanishadic search for the knowledge of *atman* (self) and Zen meditations and yoga practices and the Delphic oracle "know thyself," have 'person' as their centre of religio-philosophical inquiry. Each emphasizes the human capacity to control one's own fate and underscores the beliefs that effective living comes from within. In philosophy in the west the person-centred education and counselling received its mighty support from phenomenology and existentialism.

Carl Rogers come in this long religio-philosophic tradition which made a proper understanding of person and humanism a very central issue of human welfare. Rogers person-centred therapy has its basis in his theory of the self. He conceived human organism as self-directing. In his work *Counselling and Psychotherapy*, published in 1942 he outlined a "non-directive" approach to psychotherapy and modified it into a person-centred education in his *Client-centred Therapy*, published in 1951. "With the publication of *Freedom to Learn*, Rogers (1969) broadened person-centred therapy to education and other areas. Person-centred education revolves around the concept of understanding the learner's internal frame of reference in an attempt to make learning more experiential and self-directed."⁹ His earlier work *On Becoming a person* (1961) had already spelt out in a personal way his major concepts.

8. Edward Ignas & Raymond J. Corcini, *Alternative Educational Systems*, (F.E. peacock Pub. Co., 1979), p. 259.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

ii) *Theoretical foundation*

According to Rogers the most powerful underlying human motive for action is the tendency for self-actualization, that is a tendency to develop one's capacities in ways that serve to maintain and enrich existence. This actualizing tendency is regulated by a phenomenon called the "organismic valuing process." It means that the human organism moves toward positively valued experiences and avoids those negatively valued. The bed-rock of this self-actualizing process is the self-concept. It is a fluid changing gestalt composed of a person's total collection of attitudes, judgements, values, and beliefs with respect to one's own body, behaviour, worth and ability. One of the basic need of the self is self-esteem or regard. It consists mainly in the experience of acceptance, respect, and love from self and significant others. This experience would be a person's internal frame of reference in his behaviour. A personality is the function of a person's internal frame of reference and therefore one's behaviour can be understood only from an individual's point of view. When an individual's self-concept is positive and congruent his experience, psychological adjustment is maximal. The experience which is incongruent, negative to self-regard, leads to anxiety and to a feeling of self-disorganization. In such circumstances a person takes recourse to denials, projections, obsessions, phobias resulting in acute psychotic behaviour. Rogers postulates that it is possible to diminish incongruity by decreasing conditions of worth and increasing unconditional self-regard through person-centred therapy.¹⁰

iii) *The concept of Unconditional Positive Regard*

The word 'positive' is key to understand the theory of Roger's 'self-concept.' By positive he understands those experiences which are perceived as maintaining or enriching to the organism. Sometimes the need to receive positive regard from others may become so important that it supercedes the organismic valuing process. For Rogers, positive means an intense belief in the goodness of man. Concerning his unshaking optimism in the goodness of human organism he writes in his *On Becoming a Person*: "the inner core of man's personality is the organism itself, which is essentially both self-preserving and social." Again he writes: "It has been my experience that persons have a basically positive direction - that

10. This summary is based on E. Ignas & R.V. Corsini, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-63.

is, constructive, moving toward self-actualization, growing toward maturity, growing toward socialization." This optimism in the goodness of man is the basic inspirational force in the client-centred therapy of Rogers.

iv) *The trustworthiness of Organism*

Rogers considers the person to be a trustworthy organism whose inner core is essentially positive. The understanding of a person in the model of an organism is, of course, not an original concept of Rogers. It is rather the basic assumption on which the modern humanist psychologists base their theories. But Rogers has arrived at this premise in a unique way, and has developed a practical programme for achieving mature personality growth, relying on this insight. Like many other humanists, he also employs a phenomenological method in his attempt to understand the nature of a human person. He defines organism as a living being. Life at best is understood as a changing and flowing reality, an active process responding to the stimuli arising from within or without. Whatever be the nature of the stimuli, favourable or unfavourable, the inner urge of every organism is for the maintenance and enhancement of itself. This law works inexorably in all organisms as the directional tendency of organism toward wholeness or toward actualization of potentialities.

According to Rogers an organism stands as a unified and totally integrated entity, and it is its natural state. A disorganized condition is identified as pathological. Another natural feature of organism is that it is, to a great extent, self-controlled and in its normal state it moves toward its enhancement and toward greater independence from external control. Again in an organism a variety of drives and needs, even conflicting in nature, is harmoniously integrated by the sovereign drive, namely, the self-actualizing tendency. This drive accords singleness of purpose and renders direction and unity to life. The actualizing tendency of the organism would be blocked for a time due to the presence of unfavourable circumstances, but it would not be totally destroyed without destroying the whole organism itself. Since human being is an organism, all these features are found in the growth-process of a human person. But the human organism is very much different from other organisms, for the former is endowed with self-awareness. Hence the actualizing tendency found in human organism is called "self-actualization."

Self-actualization is the underlying flow of movement toward the constructive fulfilment of one's inherent possibilities, a natural tendency toward growth. It is selective and directional in nature. Although an individual has potentiality for self-destruction, it would not be brought to actualization unless he falls into unusual and perverse circumstances. The self-actualizing tendency may express itself in the widest range of behaviour and in response to a very wide variety of needs. Certain wants of the basic sorts must be met, at least partially, before other higher needs are attended to. There is a central source of energy in human organism which is "perhaps best conceptualized as a tendency toward fulfilment, toward actualization, not only toward maintenance but also toward the enhancement of the organism."¹¹ That is to say if the potentialities of the organisms are allowed to unfold in an orderly way by an appropriate environment, they will produce a healthy, integrated personality, although malignant environmental forces may, at any time, destroy or cripple the person. There is nothing inherently bad in the organism. The human organism is, at its deepest level trustworthy, and man's basic nature is not something to be feared, but to be released in responsible self-expression.

v) *Process of Growth*

In the physiological sphere human growth is, to a certain extent, conditioned by the genes one has received from his parents. But for Rogers mature growth which is an ever flowing process opposed to fixity and static condition means maintenance and enhancement of organism. Change is an essential condition of an organism and that it could be progressive or regressive. The former will help the individual to build up a healthy and wholesome personality, while the latter will produce a defensive and mal-adjusted personality, and the power for such a growth in either way ultimately resides within every person. For Rogers one of the optimal condition for the growth of a sound personality is the helping-relationship characterized by genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding. He has identified seven definite and discernable stages in the process of personality growth. These stages can be explained in the context of a growing relationship.

11. *On Becoming a Person*, (Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 35.

The earliest stage is that of a fixity characterized by unwillingness to communicate the self to others. No problems are perceived at this stage. Feelings and personal meanings are neither recognized nor owned. The ways in which a person construes his experience have been set by his past and are rigidly unaffected by the actualities of the present. At this stage a person has no desire for change. But when a person finds himself in a climate in which he could feel himself to be completely received, then he would begin to open himself and relate to others. When this process reaches its full growth in a person, he can be defined as an invariant variable. At this stage the quality of motion, flow and changingness could be perfectly incorporated into his psychological life. Thus a person grown mature will be able to sense exactly his feelings and the personal meaning of his experience. He will be fully aware of himself, but not as an object. It would be, rather a reflexive awareness, a subjective living in himself in motion. This type of mature growth of persons will not lead the society into anarchy, for all people have basically the same needs, including the need for acceptance by others.

vi) *Fully Functioning Person*

Rogers envisages the goal of growth as the emergence of 'a fully functioning person' in whom are reflected the qualities of openness to experience, absence of defensiveness, accurate awareness and harmonious relations with others. He will be one who is completely open to data from internal experiencing and the data from the experience of the external world, and thus well equipped to function properly in the new situations. Rogers regards a life fully functioning as 'the good life.' "The good life is the process of movement in a direction which the human organism selects when it is inwardly free to move in any direction and the general qualities of this selected direction appear to have certain universality." The 'good life' is a process, not a state of being. It involves a direction and not a destination. It presupposes the individual's experiences of freedom and exercise of choice made in accordance with the inner 'direction' of his organism. The 'direction' which constitutes 'the good life' is that which is selected by the total organism when it experiences psychological freedom to move in any direction. In this process of weighing and balancing, the organism may go wrong. But it will be ever willing to correct its mistake by feedback.

Rogers' psychological concept of 'good life' is very unorthodox, from the point of view of religion and ethics which conceives 'good life' as a state of virtue, or contentment, or *nirvana* or happiness. For Rogers 'good life' is a 'healthy way of living'. The characteristic qualities of a good life are the increasing openness of a person to experience, and existential living and an increasing trust in one's organismic life itself. A man of good life becomes completely transparent. There will be a perfect congruence or matching between his organismic experience and his awareness and his communication and his awareness. Rogers did not make it clear how for this good life is identical or different from the goal of religious or spiritual life.

Vii) *Consciousness in Personality Growth*

Consciousness is a basic experience of an individual. Rogers defines it as the "symbolisation of some of our experiences." He makes a distinction between consciousness and organismic experience. The latter includes everything potentially available to awareness that is present within the organism at any given moment. This totality of experience constitutes ones 'phenomenal field.' The phenomenal field is the individual's frame of reference which is known to him alone. The content of consciousness consists of symbolized experience, whereas that of the phenomenal field, at any given moment, is made up of conscious (symbolized) or non-conscious experiences. The symbolized experience may not sometimes correspond to any reality outside the mind. In such circumstances the individual will adopt maladjusted behaviour which will cause a rift between the 'ideal self' and 'real self.' The ideal-self is the self-image that an individual thinks that he ought to be. When the breach between the ideal-self and the real self becomes more explicit, the individual may tend to be more defensive. The way out from this unhappy predicament is possible only through a constant revision of self-structure in terms of organismic experience. This means that consciousness should function in such a way as to include and assimilate every experience of a person. "When man's unique capacity of awareness is thus functioning freely and fully, we find that we have, not an animal whom we must fear, not a beast who must be controlled, but an organism able to achieve through the remarkable integrative capacity of internal nervous system, a balanced, realistic self-enhancing, other enhancing behaviour." Thus Rogers lays great emphasis on an ever broadening consciousness which is totally consistent with the organismic experience for the emergence of fully functioning person.

4. Conclusion

As we study human reality in its depth we are all the more convinced that we can not reduce it, without distorting it, to a single perspective. Rogers' whole psychological theory rests on his profound trust in the dependability of the growth élan. A drive towards self-actualization is the mainspring of life, the tendency on which all psychotherapy depends. "It involves courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life. Yet the deeply exciting thing about human beings is that when the individual is inwardly free, he chooses as the good life this process of becoming."¹² Reflecting on the inadequacies of Rogers' humanistic psychology, Howard Clinbell writes: "For clients who are crippled by self-rejection and guilt, unconditional... positive regard and acceptance often are precisely what they need for healing and growth."¹³ When one encounters persons in whom the growth élan has been frozen for many years in a self-crippling psychosis, the inadequacy of Rogers' understanding of such grotesquely distorted personhood is evident."¹⁴

Rogers exclusive use of 'midwifery model' therapy does not allow the therapist to develop any value system for the counsellor which is alien or unknown to him, but at the same time essential for him to attain his 'wholeness.'¹⁵ Clinebell testifies that Rogers deliberately keeps away from explicit methods of value-reformulation. It seems that he believes that the values implicit in his philosophy of therapy—the value of feelings, of inner freedom and autonomy, of self-honesty (congruence), of empathic understanding and of respect for each person's unique choices and direction can be detected and that is enough for spiritual growth or meaningful religious life. Anyhow, the question whether the explicit preaching or indirect hinting at values from the context of one's life is of more use or most needed is an issue which could be debated either way.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

13. H. Clinebell, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 124.