

THE PERSON

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Carl Rogers has expressed what is basic and close to life, experiencing and understanding.¹ Rogers' description of raising moths is so vivid that a person can just visualize the fluttering of their little wings as they fly to and fro in search of food. It is this experience which brought forth the realization of the beauty, pain, warmth, sensitivity and uniqueness of becoming.

The respect for life that Rogers displays is evident in the client-centered approach. The acceptance of which Rogers speaks, acceptance of ourselves and experiencing ourselves before we can accept others, *is* a process of change. Accepting ourselves changes us and the others with whom we are involved. Rogers is calling into expression, *to let oneself flow*. To let others be free is to free yourself. To let oneself flow, to follow each feeling as it presents itself is rewarding and at times a frightening experience. Whether it be in abstract experiences of minds traveling together or more physical aspects of intimate relationships, feelings, emotions and experiences cognized, faced, felt, expressed, shared, accepted, re-felt and re-experienced, into an almost infinite progression, it is real yet so unreal, it is so shared yet so unique.

One becomes perplexed at the question of others asking how Rogers could hold such an inactive view. What is inactive about it? You cannot do it for people, you cannot experience for them, think for them, feel for them or change them to what they want to be. You cannot emote or perform for another but that does not make you an inactive participant.

Experience is fundamental, it is the highest authority. Ideas are not as authoritative as experience. It is to experience that one returns again and again discovering the process of becoming. How similar to the life of a moth is this precious life of ours which is often taken for granted. There are very few of us who realize each day is as precious as the previous one. Once we reject ourselves problems arise yet being ourselves is somehow frightening. This is a conflict that people meet in the course of life, regardless of who they are, where they are going or what they are doing. To deal with this conflict requires knowledge of what you are. Cultural and familial influences are strong and the thought of rejecting their values for your own is equivalent to rejecting the person. Rogers speaks about the effect of a trip to China. As the two countries were unfriendly, with conflicting ideologies, they hated each other intensely but as persons they found one another quite nice. The discovery of unpleasant feelings within ourselves is an objectionable discovery. We are told it is not nice to hate and not to experience certain feelings or you are a shameful person. But

what are we told to do with these frequent feelings of frustration?

Strong emotion seems to be the most difficult to handle, especially to deal with in a constructive manner. It is extremely difficult to learn that anger is an acceptable feeling. What are we to do with it? An irrational outburst not only inflicts pain upon the other but inflicts a mental pain upon the angry person. A rationalization or justification occurs, a re-interpretation of the action takes place, one to suit an acceptable form for outward appearances yet a nagging dissatisfaction remains within the self.

Rogers' work speaks to the validity of an inner non-intellectual sensing. This subject is usually labeled, put aside, discounted or kicked under the table because there are no formal or empirical rules governing it. But it is there. The creative act is dynamic, valuable and desirable but its close proximity to our existence is abhorrent, frightening and threatening. For Rogers, the human being is a force, a reality that includes all of one's being. Those who experience themselves and their worlds in inexplicable moments of what is not familiar to awareness can yet experience the feeling of this is right. This particular phenomenon gives rise to growth, positive change and respect. It is an uncritical self-reflection.

Experience sets the ground for facilitation of personal growth. The conditions the therapist provides for the person are the very ones the therapist must feel and be. How can I help you is a two way mirror. The client moves little by little and dares to peer into the reflective mirror provided by the therapist to discover what one really looks and feels like. This sets the ground to experience oneself. The therapist actually communicates to the person, in a way in which the person will actually perceive these qualities. The value of the relationship is in the client's perception of this communicated relationship.

Attitudes facilitating personal growth in the person involved in therapy are those of growth, warmth, acceptance, sensitivity, genuineness, openness, congruence and trustworthiness of the therapist as perceived by the client through unconditional positive regard. These attitudes as the primary facilitator of personal growth indicate that the client's fears, doubts, value and worth or even the right to existence in this world are in question. This question is significant to humankind, the confirmation of the fears and doubts working against the strongest biological or physiological concept around, the will to live.

The nature of the human being for Rogers, is essentially positive. In therapy, the person experiences the potential self, through the positive feelings of another. It is a learning situation and frequently non-verbal which may or may not follow the same principles as intellectual learning. The client learns acceptance. In a safe and free relationship, the therapist creates

the opportunity for a freedom to explore the self, to discover feelings and experiences.

The influence of Søren Kierkegaard is seen in Rogers' works, as the will to be that self which one truly is, which is the opposite of despair. This choice is the deepest responsibility for each person. In the emergence of a person from therapy, Rogers describes therapy in a few short words, *living a therapeutic relationship with a client*. Therapy is a process, as life is a process and in the safe accepting relationship, the client becomes. Rogers describes the process by which personality change takes place. Becoming is seen on a continuum, the person is at a point on this continuum, one direction is rigidity and the other is fluidity. Life is a flowing, changing understanding of and interpretation of experience.

One discovers what one is, an actual process of becoming one's potentials. It is a direction not a destination. With this comes the acceptance of self and others. Rogers describes the characteristics of movement as seen in person after person in therapy: 1) Increasing openness to experience; 2) Existential living; 3) Trust.

Being able to accept one's own experience moves toward openness to and acceptance of the experience of others. Each person is different. No two people are alike or think alike. This is what makes life so worthwhile. Living life to the fullest and enjoying what we like doing best. This is really what makes a person unique.

The awareness of oneself which flows freely in and through experience is social as we are in the world with others.² We are in relation. The implications of the trustworthiness of the human being and the wider richness of life which is available comes forth. The person is encouraged to become, to be able to say: "This is me."

Notes

- 1) Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961).
- 2) Mary Geneva Caruso, *Reflection and Its Consequences* (San Francisco: Golden Phoenix Press, 1985).