On Transcending Person-Centred Postmodernist Porridge

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In 'Person-centred porridge', an earlier contribution to this journal (Ellingham, 1998), I made reference to the 'porridge' of ideas known as postmodernism. I passed comment on how, in my view, several counsellor educators associated with the person-centred approach, Hazel Johns, John McLeod and Pete Sanders, in their writings on counselling 'gobble up too much of the postmodernist agenda' (p. 111). What I had to say prompted a vigorous critical reaction from Sanders (Sanders, 1999), not least over my failing—for which I have since apologised—to explain my critique of his own work, *First Steps in Counselling* (1996), 'or elaborate with examples' (Sanders, 1999, p. 49).

In what follows I attempt to remedy this failing in relation not only to Sanders' *First Steps*, but to the writings of Johns and McLeod. I take the opportunity, too, to say more about postmodernism in relation to the person-centred approach.

A few lumps

Set out below are passages from Johns, McLeod and Sanders, respectively, which I take to be indicative of overindulgence in postmodernist ideas:

> It has been said that 'the human organism seems capable of enduring anything in the universe except a clear, complete, fully conscious view of himself (*sic)* as he actually is' (Egan, 1973). Jourard (1964) reinforces this strongly: 'When a man does not acknowledge to himself, who, what and how he is, he is out of touch with reality and he will sicken and die'. The premise here is that there is one way to define what self means, while the reality is that there are many depending on academic, philosophical, religious or theoretical approach. (Johns, 1996, p. 6)

The field of counselling and psychotherapy represents a synthesis of ideas from science, philosophy, religion and the arts. It is an interdisciplinary area that cannot appropriately be incorporated or subsumed into any one of its constituent disciplines. An approach to counselling which was, for example, purely scientific or purely religious in nature would soon be seen not to be counselling at all, in its denial of key areas of client and practitioner experience. (McLeod, 1993, pp. 7-8)

The case being made here is that only an interdisciplinary perspective can enable counselling and psychotherapy to generate adequate understandings of persons…These trends represent steps in the re-alignment of counselling and psychotherapy research toward human science. In human science there is no objective truth. All of us, therapists, clients, researchers, are engaged in negotiating and co-constructing shared understandings of events. These understandings are best seen as local knowledges rather than universal truths. (McLeod, 1994, p. 191)

[E]ach of the 'theories' or approaches that I am going to cover was developed and presented by a white man from northern Europe or North America. This is a serious problem since ideas that people have, spring from the culture in which they live. The ideas that white men can think up are limited by their whiteness and their maleness (and in the case of the theorists covered here, by their privileged, educated status). We have to ask whether it is reasonable to believe that white, middle-class, educated men are the only people with anything useful to say about helping, and the answer is, of course, no. We now realise that the ideas that have guided our thinking about counselling for the last 100 or so years are, for the most part androcentric (centred around male ways of thinking and doing things) and ethnocentric (centred around the culture and race of the theorist, i.e. white culture)….We can, then, reasonably expect the ideas to reflect and be shaped by the cultural biases and mores that prevailed….The effect of basing a helping

> approach on theory that is so culturally narrow, that only supports the status quo, is that is simply absorbs and passes on any institutionalised discrimination and oppression that is a feature of that culture. So to different extents, all theories are presenting very narrow views of people—namely psychologies based on being white, being a man, being able-bodied, being educated, etc. (Sanders, 1996, pp. 16-17)

To comment in turn on the above vis-à-vis what I wrote in 'Person-centred porridge':

- Johns, it seems to me, in the passage quoted and in succeeding discussion, allows postmodernist thought to hold sway through suggesting that we are actually different 'selves' insofar as such 'selves' are constructions of different contexts and cultural perspectives. We do not possess, that is, a 'core' or 'real' self.

- McLeod clearly, in my view, can be seen to be endorsing the postmodernist opinion that knowledge is 'a local phenomenon specifically generated by the narratives and discourse of the local culture', or specialized cultural disciplines (Ellingham, 1998, p. 111).

- Sanders too, as I see things, appears to be regarding knowledge as a local phenomenon confined by not only the culture, but also the race, and gender of the individual theorist.

Why person-centred postmodernism makes me queasy

Now why, as someone committed to the person-centred approach, someone concerned for the further development of person-centred theory, does the adoption in this way of postmodernist notions by these basically person-centred counsellor educators irk

me so much? Why does it lead me to engage in what Sanders describes as 'anxious hectoring' (1999, p. 49), but which, as I would here like to make plain, is not a matter of affecting a judgemental attitude but of exercising a non-judgemental, rational and critical judgement?

Basically what I am concerned about is that in seeking to further develop person-centred theory—to my mind a very necessary exercise (cf. Ellingham, 1997b)—we don't get rid of the baby with the bathwater; we don't lose the essential core of the approach, so that instead of building up and bolstering something which at root is essentially coherent and sound, we create a hybrid which is fundamentally fissured and incongruent, a jumbled pastiche whose disparate features command the allegiance of competing splinter groups.

Against the backdrop of Sanders' remarks, then—both in the above quotation and in his critical response to 'Person-centred porridge'—allow me to elaborate further on the relationship between postmodernism and person-centred theory.

Analysing the ingredients

Consider to begin with the following statements made by Sanders in his critical response. 'I subscribe to the view', he says, 'that the concepts of the formative tendency, actualizing tendency and associated implications for practice represent the best-developed contemporary metaphors and models for all natural sciences from physics through ecology and social sciences to psychotherapy' (1999, p. 49). Sanders does, though, take issue with my 'thesis that psychotherapy is pre-paradigmatic (Ellingham, 1995 and 1997)' making reference to material of his which is in preparation on this topic. 'I prefer', he amplifies,

> to take a wider social constructionist view, looking at the place of scientific paradigms in relation to the *zeitgeist.* This may sound to Ellingham distressingly

> like postmodernism, but I believe there is more to offering a critique of modernism than postmodernism. All you have to do is look at the evidence and make up your mind. (ibid.)

In what follows I use these remarks of Sanders to analyse ingredients of postmodernism apropos person-centred theory. I organize my discussion around three topics: meta-narratives/paradigms; the formative tendency as principle of cosmic growth; and the actualizing tendency as principle of self-growth.

(a) Meta-narratives/paradigms

As far as I am concerned, Sanders' credal affirmation regarding the best developed nature of 'the concepts of the formative tendency, actualizing tendency and associated implications for practice' can indeed fairly be regarded as definitely *anti*-postmodernist in character. **Sentence omitted.**

Indeed as Sanders himself points up, affirmation of faith in the legitimacy of Rogers' concepts of the actualizing tendency and the formative tendency—set forth by Rogers as 'the foundation blocks of the person-centred approach' (Rogers, 1980, p. 114)—definitely flies in the face of the postmodernist posture of entertaining 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv), for both these concepts are essentially 'meta-narrational' in character, i.e. pertaining to a 'grand' theory/global paradigm regarding the nature of reality. The claim for each concept is that it identifies a general or universal truth about an objective reality.

Take first the less general of these 'two related tendencies' (Rogers, 1980, p. 114), the actualizing tendency.

As Rogers construes it, the actualizing tendency is 'a tendency which permeates all of organic life—a tendency to become all the complexity of which the organism is capable' (ibid., p. 134). 'We can say', he avows,

> that there is in every organism, at whatever level, an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfillment of its inherent possibilities. In human beings, too, there is a natural tendency toward a more complex and complete development. The term that has most often been used for this is the 'actualizing tendency', and it is present in every organism. (ibid., pp. 117-8)

By comparison, subsuming the actualizing tendency and 'on an even larger scale', the formative tendency is a 'directional tendency….which can equally well be observed at every level of the universe' (Rogers, 1980, pp. 134, 114, 133, 125). It is 'an evolutionary tendency toward greater order, greater complexity, greater interrelatedness', 'a creative, not a disintegrative process' responsible for the fact that 'every form that we see or know has emerged from a simpler less complex form' (ibid. pp. 133, 125).

Now whether or not these two concepts are legitimate scientific concepts or not—that is to say, whether they denote in abstract terms a pattern or Gestalt which is indeed universal and common to all organisms, to all 'levels' of the universe, respectively—it is clear that they aim at being 'meta-narrational' and as such are anti-postmodernist in character. Given that the concepts of the actualizing and formative tendencies are 'the foundation blocks of the person-centred approach', we thus encounter important evidence in support of Matthew Jones' judgement that '[p]ostmodernism stands in direct opposition to the kind of universal claims that Rogers makes for his theories' (1996, p. 20).

Here the point is that postmodernism, as Vivien Burr defines it, is both '[t]he rejection of "grand narratives" in theory *and* the replacement of a search for truth with a celebration of the multiplicity of (equally valid) perspectives' (1995, p. 185—my

emphasis). For postmodernism, 'the real is not a single, integrated system. It is, instead, a disunited fragmented accumulation of disparate elements and events' (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 149).

All of which begins to make plain just what a comforting philosophy postmodernism is for members of the field of counselling/psychotherapy in general, a field made up of a multiplicity of alternative theoretical perspectives. **Because**, by subscribing to the postmodernist credo of equal strokes for folks of all theoretical persuasions, I get the payoff that certainly my personally preferred theory is OK. Moreover, if every theory is as good as any other the way is free for me to mix and match different features of different theories purely on the basis of person preference, *à la* Petruska Clarkson (1995)**--hence** Ray Woolfe's remark that postmodernist thought lies behind 'a gradual move towards greater eclecticism' (1995, p. 35).

Fortunately, as far as I am concerned, the sense of empowerment that those within the field of counselling/psychotherapy **(or c/p)** gain from postmodernism apropos constructing their personal individually tailored 'model' of counselling is essentially a delusion of grandeur, an empty celebration. For, as Ernest Gellner points up, intrinsic to postmodernist thought is the doctrine of 'Relativismus Über Alles' (1992, p. 40), thoroughgoing relativism. To say that the rival and competing theories of c/p constitute a 'multiplicity of (equally valid) perspectives' is to adopt the position of relativism, a position that cannot fail but lead to anarchy, to 'nihilism' (Gellner, 1992, p. 49).

An example from the world of c/p which to my mind highlights the anarchical and nihilistic logic implicit in the adoption of a postmodernist stance is provided by the case of the female psychiatric patient featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* who had been 'sexually abused' by her female psychiatrist. The psychiatrist's justification for imposing physical sexual contact on her patient against her patient's will was that this was a valid psychotherapeutic intervention based on the theoretical principles of behaviour therapy and psychodynamic therapy. In terms of her own 'equally valid perspective' what the

psychiatrist was doing was taking on the ‘transference’ role of the patient’s mother and actively engaging in a process of ‘desensitizing’ the patient to the trauma of having been sexually abused by her mother.

To my mind, such a rationale is patent nonsense, not just for me personally but as a general truth. To accept the legitimacy of a psychotherapist acting in such a fashion leads us into the anarchical domain of our not being able to designate as illegitimate any act perpetrated on a counselling client whatsoever. As Cole Porter might have crooned, ‘In postmodernism, Heaven knows, Anything goes!’

Privileging postmodernism, it becomes difficult to envisage how it is possible to lay down accepted definitions of counselling/psychotherapy or establish ethical and professional guidelines. In fact, to have a profession of c/p in the first place.

Which raises the question of how postmodernists have come to espouse such a seemingly nonsensical mishmash of ideas. What on earth has led an amazing number of prominent academics to find their marbles in such a fashion?

Under the influence of ‘the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein (1953) and Rorty (1979) as well as the poststructural literary theory and philosophy of such writers as Foucault, Derrida and de Man’ (Held, 1995, pp. 3-4), the fractured frames of postmodernist thought can be said to derive from the premise ‘that what we know, and how we go about trying to know anything, is shaped by the times, places and cultures in which we live’ (Jones, 1996, p. 16). From this position postmodernists move on to maintain that ‘[a]ll truths…are *merely* constructions in language by knowers situated in *particular* discursive contexts’ (Held, 1995, pp. 7-8 & 9).

Bounded by the ‘rules’ of our particular Wittgensteinian language ‘game’, embedded in our own language-laden world, ‘we can never get outside language to attain knowledge of an independent—extralinguistic—reality’ (ibid., p. 8). For, by virtue of the

fact ‘that nothing exists beyond the “text”’, we have a situation in which we human beings, and all the other “things” present to us, are socially discursively produced’ (Burr, p. 89)—hence Burr’s assertion that postmodernism represents ‘[t]he cultural intellectual “backcloth” against which [the movement in the social sciences known as] social constructionism has taken shape’ (ibid. p. 12); as well as the associated view of Kenneth Gergen that ‘social constructionist dialogues’—dialogues that argue that ‘all knowledge, including psychological knowledge, is historically and culturally specific’—‘are essentially constituents of the broader, postmodern dialogues’ (Gross, et. al., 1997, pp. 18).

When, therefore, Sanders speaks of taking ‘a wider social constructionist view’—even as he takes up an anti-postmodernist posture in affirming the ‘best developed’ character of the meta-narrational concepts of the actualizing and formative tendencies—the onus is upon him to make plain why this ‘wider’ view is not indeed an expression of postmodernism. Why, what does indeed sound to me ‘distressingly like postmodernism’, is in fact not a dollop of this present-day intellectual porridge. Particularly so, in light of the social constructionist-cum-postmodernist character to his remarks in the passage from *First Steps in Counselling* quoted earlier. It is one thing to say that the ideas that white men can think up are likely to be limited by their whiteness, another to say that they actually are; one thing to say that ‘the ideas that have guided our thinking about counselling for the last 100 or so years are, for the most part androcentric (centred around male ways of thinking and doing things) and ethnocentric (centred around the race and culture of the theorist, i.e. white culture)’, another to say that for this reason ‘all theories are presenting a very narrow view of people’; one thing to speak of psychologies as being developed by white, able-bodied and educated men, another to speak of ‘psychologies based on being white, being a man, being able-bodied, being educated’ (Sanders, 1996, p. 17).

Aside from wondering what type of knowledge of counselling a mixed race, physically disabled hermaphrodite would generate, suggesting that theoretical knowledge

cannot transcend social and cultural difference raises the question of whether it will ever be possible to achieve genuine scientific understanding within the field; whether there is the logical possibility of generating what Thomas Kuhn (1970) has termed a scientific paradigm. For it is the nature of scientific paradigms, of global theories, that they define the methods and subject matter of a particular science, that they are accepted transculturally as true statements about objective reality by men and women of diverse states of physical well-being—witness the Navaho nuclear physicist, Marie Curie and Stephen Hawking.

Are, for instance, Einstein's 'scientific stories' limited by his Jewishness? A more likely hypothesis might be that his Jewishness enabled him to develop ideas that transcended culture.

Neither view is really relevant, however, because from a logical point of view, and in comparison to culturally specific ways of cognizing the world, abstract scientific theories and paradigms inhabit a different logical domain over and against their culturally confined notions. Further, a fundamental feature of scientific paradigms is not that one, say, the Einsteinian, represents an alternative and equally valid perspective compared to its predecessor, the Newtonian paradigm (in the manner of to and fro visual gestalt switches of seeing a drawing as either a cat or a rabbit). The switch from the old Newtonian ideational Gestalt to its novel Einsteinian successor is of a growthful nature. Einstein's theorizing, that is to say, provides a more precise, comprehensive and complex representation of the physical universe than that previously provided by the paradigm of Newton.

Kuhn's proposal is that revolutionary Gestalt switches from one scientific paradigm to the next are marked by a pre-paradigm period, wherein there exists a multiplicity of rival and competing theories. It is on the basis of this proposal that I have posited the hypothesis to which Sanders refers: that the multiplicity of rival and competing theories within the field of c/p is not a manifestation of equally valid

perspectives, as the postmodernist surmises, but of the spawning of a new paradigm. If Sanders neither accepts the postmodernist position that these are equally valid theoretical perspectives, nor regards such a plethora of counselling theories as pre-paradigmatic, then I shall be very interested to find out how he does regard them—particularly so, since with reference to person-centred theory, the process of more complex scientific Gestalt succeeding simpler forebear is nothing other than an evidential instance of the workings of the cosmic growth principle of the formative tendency.

This tendency, as defined by Rogers, is anti-postmodernist with a vengeance. Let me attempt to explain why.

(b) The formative tendency, principle of cosmic growth

Aside from being a meta-narrational notion, Rogers' cosmic growth principle of the formative tendency is decidedly at odds with postmodernist viewpoints in that to affirm its reality is to affirm that growth and evolution has taken place, and continues to take place, with respect to the overall advance of human consciousness and psychological well-being.

Like Ken Wilbur (cf. Wilbur, 1996), Rogers believes in 'the ongoing process of human evolution' (1964, p. 183). In particular, he regards '[t]he ability to focus conscious attention…to be one of the latest evolutionary developments in our species' (1980, p. 127). To him, '[i]t seems that the human organism has been moving toward the more complete development of awareness' (ibid., p. 127). It is in such an advance, according to Rogers, that we behold the workings of the formative tendency.

Elaborating further on how '[c]onsciousness is participating in this larger, creative formative tendency', Rogers cites the example of individuals who through developing greater awareness 'more surely…float in a direction consonant with the directional evolutionary flow' (ibid. p. 128). These individuals, he contends, are 'moving in the

direction of wholeness, integration, a unified life'; they are 'touching the cutting edge of our ability to transcend ourselves, to create new and more spiritual directions in human evolution' (ibid. pp. 128, 127-8, 134).

In 'Person-centred porridge', I attempted to spell out just why Rogers' notion of a formative tendency motivating the advance of human consciousness is anathema to postmodernists. 'Rightly horrified', I explained, 'by the atrocities perpetrated in the twentieth century by so-called civilised and superior cultures, postmodernists eschew the Enlightenment faith that science and reason can bring about increasing progress for humankind in the manner implied by the formative tendency' (Ellingham, 1998, p. 111).

In light of such atrocities, it would certainly seem reasonable to question whether there is actually ongoing evolution of human life and consciousness? And even if there is, to posit the existence of a cosmic growth principle, as Rogers does, would seem to be at odds with belief in Darwin's theory of evolution based on random mutation.

To the postmodernist, though, the truth of Rogers' or Darwin's 'stories' is not the issues; each should be viewed as equally valid.

Which raises the question as to just why postmodernists are so vehemently opposed to Rogers' 'story' of the evolutionary advance of human consciousness, when it must be considered to have equal validity with other stories.

What we encounter in such an attitude, I believe, is the self-contradictory and illogical character to postmodernist thought. Postmodernists want to have their porridge and eat it: to say that their narrative—namely, that there are no meta-narratives—is more equal than others, i.e. is actually a meta-narrative.

Having examined how Rogers' concept of the formative tendency is at odds with postmodernist thought, I turn now to consider the anti-postmodernist character of Rogers' concept of the actualizing tendency, in relation to counselling/psychotherapy in particular.

(c) The actualizing tendency and self-growth

Rogers' concept of the actualizing tendency is fundamental to his theory of c/p and is the first concept featured in his most rigorous theory statement (Rogers, 1959). We have already seen how Rogers conceives the person as an organism, a complex pattern of activity, wherein, as with all organisms, 'there is a natural tendency toward a more complex and complete development', 'an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfillment of its inherent possibilities' (1980, pp. 118,117). For Rogers, this 'actualizing tendency' is the only motivational force at work in the human organism. Not only is it responsible for the growth of the 'undeveloped' into 'the developed organism' (Rogers, 1951, p. 489; cf. Rogers, 1959, p. 196), but in the context of counselling it is also 'evident in the general tendency of clients to move in the direction of growth' (Rogers, 1951, p. 489). The point here is that

> environmental circumstances can prevent the human organism from moving in actualizing directions. The elements that surround it—physical and psychological—can mean that the actualizing tendency is stunted or stopped altogether; is able to exert itself in warped, bizarre, or abnormal manifestations; and turns in socially destructive ways rather than constructive ways. (Rogers & Sanford, 1989, p. 1492)

To explain what he means by such socially destructive individual development, Rogers employs a biological metaphor: that of a potato which in growing in a bin in a poorly lit basement produced unhealthy 'pale white sprouts, so unlike the health green shoots…sent up when planted in the soil' (Rogers, 1980, p. 118).

Set against the backdrop of such biological reasoning, Rogers' theorizing regarding c/p deals extensively with defining those psychological conditions whose absence, on the one hand, leads to impaired psychological functioning, and whose presence, by contrast, facilitates the development of 'the fully functioning person', the hypothetical optimally psychologically healthy individual. The phenomenon of c/p is thus essentially defined by Rogers as the process that occurs when an individual whose psychological growth has been impaired due to the lack of such facilitative conditions subsequently has them provided by a therapist, and so comes to grow further in the direction of becoming fully functioning.

To explain this growthful change process in more detail, Rogers employs a concept which he variously labels 'Self, Concept of self, Self-structure' (1959, p. 200), having been much impressed by the fact that when clients experienced psychotherapeutic change and moved towards becoming fully functioning they talked of becoming their true or real self. 'To be that self that one truly is' is a phrase of Kierkegaard's which Rogers came to regard as aptly describing a process which doesn't just apply to counselling clients, but to human beings in general and as such constitutes 'the goal of life' (Rogers, 1961, p. 166).

In characterizing the concept of self, or self-picture, Rogers describes it as being formed by the operation of the actualizing tendency, as from infancy individuals 'become aware of experiences that they discriminate as being "me"' (Rogers & Sanford, 1989, p. 1492). The ongoing functioning of this tendency means that the individual 'moves in the direction of increasing self-government, self-regulation, and autonomy, and from heteronymous control, or control by external forces' (Rogers, 1951, p. 488). The self-concept, therefore, 'may be thought of as an organized, consistent conceptual gestalt composed of the perceptions of the "me" or 'I' and the perceptions of the relationships of this "I" to the outside world and to others' (ibid.). 'It is a fluid and changing gestalt, a process, but at any given moment it is a specific entity' (Rogers, 1959, p. 200).

As Rogers conceives it, the process of forming the self from the field of experiences is that of 'symbolization'. When optimal facilitative psychological conditions apply, experience is accurately symbolized in awareness and the individual develops a congruent self-concept. When these conditions are less than optimal, experience is symbolized in a distorted fashion or not symbolized at all, with the result that the individual develops an incongruent self-concept, i.e. incongruence exists between conscious awareness and organismic experience.

The process of psychotherapeutic change can in consequence be explained as a shift from incongruence to congruence, a shift from the individual possessing a less-congruent, less-accurate self-gestalt to having a self-gestalt which is more-congruent, more accurate and thus more the true or real self.

In relation to the workings of the actualizing tendency, therefore, '[w]hen there is a high degree of incongruence, the actualizing tendency acquires a confused or bifurcated role' such that '[t]he self is moving in one direction and the organism in another' (Rogers & Sanford, 1989, p. 1492). On the other hand, the more congruent the person is, the more real, integrated and whole they are; the more 'completely in one piece' and close to what they really are (1980, p. 15). Open to their experiencing, they are closer, too, to being a fully functioning person and knowing themselves as the process gestalt that they actually are (cf. Rogers, 1961, chpt. 9). What this means is that 'the self and personality…emerge from experience rather than experience being translated or twisted to a pre-conceived self-structure' (Rogers, 1983, p. 288), as in the case of the incongruent self.

In his ultimate characterization of the fully functioning person, Rogers' theorizing takes the form of speculation surrounding his own experience. As he himself acknowledges, it even 'partakes of the mystical' (Rogers, 1980, p. 130). Speaking of moments when he is functioning at his best, Rogers says that,

> I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch to the unknown in me,….when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core in me….: 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 are present. (ibid, p. 129)

Elsewhere Rogers further recounts that when such a sense of oneness between self and other occurs there is 'also the satisfaction of feeling one's self in touch with what is universally true', 'the same order we find in the universe as a whole' (ibid. p. 8). In other words, it is as if the individual comes to an awareness of themselves beyond that of appreciating that they are a unitary and process expression of the actualizing tendency. Rather, they enjoy 'a transcendent awareness of the harmony and unity of the cosmic system, including humankind' (ibid., p. 133), knowing themselves to be one with the formative tendency, to be moving in tune with it. Their inner sensing thus tunes them 'into human value directions emerging from the experiencing of the human organism' which they freely choose to follow (1964, p. 184)). Such a person, Rogers opines,

> would not necessarily be 'adjusted' to his (*sic.*) culture, and he would almost certainly not be a conformist. But at any time and in any culture he would live constructively, in as much harmony with his culture as a balanced satisfaction of needs of needs demanded. (Rogers, 1983, pp. 291-2)

Participating in the growthful advance of the 'larger, creative formative tendency, he or she constitutes 'a fit vanguard of human evolution', a torchbearer of human consciousness as a whole (Rogers, 1980, p. 128; 1983, p. 292).

Having taken stock of the cosmic relevance of the actualizing tendency and the person-centred concept of self, once again we find a chasmic difference when we compare these notions of Rogers to those of postmodernism.

For postmodernist thought, as Gross, et. al., remind us, 'Discourses (and theories are discourses)… construct reality' (1997, p. 37). The self being no exception, it like any other 'entity' is said to be 'socially discursively produced'. It is not 'some real entity, but…an object of discourse' (ibid, p. 38); 'whatever self or identity exists is solely constituted by means of ever-shifting interpersonal (linguistic) interactions that define social roles in language' (Held, 1996, p. 16).

This being the case, just as different cultures construct different 'realities', so 'the self is constructed differently in different cultures' (ibid., p. 38). In consequence, 'our views on the self [along with that of all Westerners, Rogers included,] are not any more true than any other people's', since it is 'a construction which fits our society and historical circumstances' (ibid., p. 39). 'Our current concept of self cannot be universalised to other cultures since it will not be 'useful' to them' (ibid.).

Here we see an example of how '[u]sefulness and *not* truthfulness is what postmodernists emphasise about discourse' (ibid, p. 37), for with the perspectives of different cultures being 'equally valid', one concept of self cannot be described as any more true than any other.

Such a view of the self has interesting repercussions for postmodernist writings on psychotherapy, where self-change as a result of c/p is not seen *à la* Rogers, as growth taking place in a self which is coherent and enduring, since to the postmodernist '[a] permanent self is merely an illusion that we cling to, a narrative developed in relation to others over time that we come to identify as who we are' (Lax, 1992, p. 71).

Instead, postmodernists speak of persons in therapy merely changing one self-narrative or discourse for another 'equally valid', but more 'useful' one. '"True" or "false" become inappropriate ways of thinking about selfhood' (Burr, 1995, p. 29). And, indeed, with all of us employing different discourses and texts, according to the different social contexts, or narrative settings in which we live our lives, '[i]t is possible to say that

we have no “true” self but that we have a number of selves which are equally real’ (ibid.). In other words, rather than ‘people having single, unified and fixed selves,…we are fragmented, having a multiplicity of potential selves which are not necessarily consistent with one another’ (ibid.). Our identity is thus best construed as ‘multifaceted’, in that we possess ‘a number of contextual selves, the people we are in different relational settings’ (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996, p. 223).

On the postmodernist agenda, then, ‘[e]ven the self is not a unified whole, but a complex of unintegrated images and events’ (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 149).

Consider, therefore, an example cited in support of such a postmodernist view. It comes from the autobiographical account by anthropologist Dorinne Kondo of her experiences in Japan as a born and raised American of Japanese origin.

Kondo relates that after a period of ‘immersing’ herself in the life of a particular Japanese family and assuming a ‘Japanese daughter’s role’, she was out shopping at the butcher’s one day when she ‘glanced into the shiny metal surface of the butcher’s display case’ (in Stevens, 1990, pp. 268 & 270). ‘I noticed’, she says,

> someone who looked terribly familiar: a typical young housewife,…a woman walking with characteristically Japanese bend to the knees and a sliding of the feet. Suddenly I clutched the handle of the stroller to steady myself as a wave of dizziness washed over me, for I realized I had caught a glimpse of nothing less than my own reflection. (ibid.)

According to Kondo herself, what had occurred ‘was a fragmentation of the self’ (ibid. p. 269).

But was this actually ‘a fragmentation of the self’? Because I would argue that while from one perspective Kondo could be said to have developed a concept of self which was different from and at odds with her original American one, she still had a

sense of continuity in relation to the two. So, for instance, while she might say: 'In that cultural environment "I" developed this concept of self; in the other "I" developed that concept of self', her 'self' was not fragmented in the sense of being broken into separate bits or entities. There was still a consistent 'I' linking the 'bits'. Besides which, it is safe to assume, in my view, that Kondo uses the term 'fragmented' as one of many anthropologists 'immersed' in postmodernist ideas. If her self had been truly fragmented, then one self would not have known the other; falling into the hands of American or Japanese psychiatrists she would likely have been diagnosed as suffering from multiple personality disorder or been seen as possessing 'the divided self' (Laing, 1960) of the 'schizophrenic'.

To my way of thinking, therefore, fragmentation of the self is not an accurate way of describing Kondo's experience.

This does not mean, though, that I don't believe that such an experience and the different sense of self experienced by individuals in different cultures doesn't raise questions regarding Rogers' theorizing and the person-centred concept of self. I believe, for instance, that Len Holdstock makes an important point when, as a person-centred thinker, he asks, 'Can we afford not to revision the person-centred concept of self?'(1993, p. 229).

Influenced by postmodernist thought, Holdstock sees Rogers' person-centred concept of self as representative of a 'monocultural' (i.e. Western) perspective on the self, part of the tradition which treats the self as 'a demarcated entity', 'self-contained', 'bounded', 'self-reliant and independent' (ibid.). In other words, it constitutes one of '[o]ur Western models of self, with their emphases on autonomy, independence and separation from others' (Gross, et., 1997, p. 40).

Highlighting the ethnocentric character of such a concept of self, Holdstock cites anthropological research that reveals that 'in contrast to the egocentric-contractual self of

the West…[t]he basic unit in non-Western culture is….the bipolar self as sociocentric-organic' (Holdstock, 1993, p. 241). The non-Western self, that is to say, is a self-in-relation-to-the-other, part of an 'interdependent system', an 'organic' culture (ibid.).

Overall, therefore, despite a variation among non-Western cultures about 'what counts as self', the 'common factor seems to be the sociocentric or embedded self, and not the bounded, masterful self' (ibid., p. 242). It is on such grounds that a Western concept of self 'will be at odds with the much more relational and collective notions about the self in Japan, and may even appear "wrong" and "abnormal" (Gross, et. al., 1997, p. 40). 'To a greater or lesser degree', it is found that 'such cultures place the individual within the context of other, larger, social, religious and even cosmic explanations' (ibid., p. 39).

In response to Holdstock's question about the need to revision the person-centred concept of self, I would make the following points:

- Yes, the anthropological research which shows that different cultures enjoy a relational notion of self does need to be taken into account in a revised formal person-centred concept of self.

- In a bid to bond postmodernism to modern-day organic or holistic theory, Holdstock clearly glosses over the fragmentary nature of postmodernist thought, particularly when he says 'postmodern developments towards a globally linked world system call for a dramatic revisioning of the way the self has been conceptualized' (1993, p. 244). Postmodernists have made much of the different perspectives on the self of different cultures, but it is not postmodernist to privilege the non-Western organic concept of self over the Western individualistic concept.

- I feel the criticism of Rogers as endorsing a stereotypical Western concept of self must be tempered somewhat in light of what he also has to say, especially in his later writings, about the psychological healthy individual enjoying oneness with the other and with the cosmos. Conceivably Rogers is here pointing the way towards a concept of self which is an integration of Western and non-Western formulations. As Brian Thorne (1991) has also written, 'It is possible, I believe, to see Carl's work with encounter groups and then with cross-cultural communities and the peace movement as his gradual discovery of the glory of human beings when they are truly interconnected and find their fulfilment in participation which enhances rather than denies their uniqueness' (p. 186).

- I am in agreement with Holdstock when he goes on to locate the organismic revisioning of the person-centred concept of self within the general development of organismic thought in the realm of science. Indeed, I have argued that person-centred theory as a whole needs to be so revisioned (cf. Ellingham, 1999).

A final helping

I hope that in the preceding remarks I have begun to make clear the extent to which person-centred theory is crucially at odds with postmodernist thought. At root, postmodernism represents a melange of ideas aimed at making sense of a salient and trenchant puzzle for contemporary thought: the diversity of different views on the world and our failure to conceptualize a relationship between them—a puzzle which in the realm of c/p translates as a multiplicity of rival and competing schools of thought.

To discern a relationship between the one and the many has always been a challenge to the human mind. Committed as they are to celebrating the worth of their

clients' personal world-visions, it is no wonder that person-centred thinkers have been drawn to a movement that honours such different visions as equally valid. Not surprisingly perhaps, they are in the very best of company in so doing. For Carl Rogers himself, in particular in his paper 'Do we need a reality?' (1980, chpt. 5), at times clearly adopts a postmodernist stance. In this work, having spoken of there being 'as many different worlds as people', Rogers engages in the following rhetoric,

> Can we today afford the luxury of having 'a' reality? Can we still preserve the belief that there is a real world upon whose definition we all agree? I am convinced that this is a luxury we *cannot* afford, a myth we dare not maintain. (1980, pp. 102 & 104)

Now of course it is possible to believe that there is one true and real world even though we are not agreed on its definition, so that it is rather tendentious of Rogers to phrase one of the questions as he does. But finding fault in this fashion does not necessarily help us to make sense of the conundrum of wishing to value the worth of each person's personal world-vision without falling into the postmodernist chaos of saying that each is 'equally valid'.

There is, though, as I see things a resolution to this conundrum. It relates to a point I made earlier. What we are doing, I would submit, when we judge individuals' different world-pictures as equally valid representations is to confuse different logical domains, different levels of discourse. For, to value a person's personal world-view as that person's personal creation is not to value it as a true and objective account of reality.

Rogers himself endorsed the view that science seeks to privilege and make objective sense of a 'subjective guiding vision', 'a mystical 'vision of reality beyond the impression of our senses' (Rogers, 1980, p. 238; Polanyi, p. 5, cited in Rogers, 1980, p. 237), one that we apprehend through trusting in our 'total organismic sensing' (Rogers,

1990, p. 272). ‘We are indeed’, as Rogers has put it, ‘wiser than our intellects’ (1980, p. 83); there is a non-discursive mind beyond the discursive.

Insofar, therefore, as all human knowing, in whatever culture, may be said to be rooted in the personal experience of mystical wonder, of ‘the apprehension of a rationality which commands our respect and arouses a contemplative admiration’ (Polanyi, p. 5, cited in Rogers, 1980, p. 237), we can agree with Doug Land in his answer, ‘Yes, Carl we do need “a” reality!’; when, that is, Land points up that ‘our personal realities are our various attempts to make sense of our place in the larger given reality’ (Land, 1996, pp. 69 & 68). ‘These internal realities’, Land elaborates,

> are made up of metaphors and images and stories and myths and worldviews which reach toward and point us to that ultimate reality which is beyond us. The human abilities to abstract and imagine are great gifts, gifts which can catch a sense of the universal in the particulars of here and now, but they can also become dead ends when they are disconnected from the very whole of which they are only a part. Even if we cannot fully see or explain the mystery of that larger reality, we do need to acknowledge it and face up to it or we reduce the Person-Centred Approach to mere solipsism. (p. 69)
>
> ….And, I would add, land ourselves in the porridge of postmodernism.

On such a view, the seemingly disparate personal and cultural visions are ‘only a series of changing approximations to the truth’ (Rogers, 1977, p. 250), ingredients of the cosmic growth process by which we gain an ever greater comprehension of that process’s objective, real and unitary nature.

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