

“THE QUIET REVOLUTIONARY”: A TIMELY REVISITING OF CARL ROGERS’ VISIONARY CONTRIBUTION TO HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

KATHLEEN O’DWYER

Ireland

ABSTRACT

Many aspects of life today are perceived as complex and perplexing, and in particular the many-faceted area of human relationships. This article argues that the ideas and visions of Carl Rogers offer a constructive and encouraging perspective which merits a re-examination and a consideration of its relevance in our contemporary world. Rogers’ work was primarily directed towards the development of his counselling and psychotherapeutic theories. However, his writings also convey a deep commitment to intimacy, genuineness and real communication in significant relationships in everyday life. Rogers’ vision of genuine relationship may be deemed idealistic and irrelevant to contemporary living; however, an examination of Rogers’ ‘core conditions’ for optimal human relating and his understanding of human flourishing reveals a courageous faith and hope in human nature. Perhaps, our present world, with its ever-expanding array of virtual connectivity and corresponding alienation, may be enriched by a careful consideration of Rogers’ insights and ideals.¹⁸

“We have to imagine more courageously if we are to greet
creation more fully” (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 140).

“Truth tends to reveal its highest wisdom in the guise of
simplicity” (Nietzsche, 1984, p. 253).

Carl Rogers is generally remembered as one of the founders of humanistic or person-centred psychotherapy. A recollection of his work evokes many of the key concepts underlying his philosophy—“congruence,” “acceptance,” “empathy,” and “self-actualization.” However, in my view, the significance of Rogers’ thought and its relevance outside the therapeutic setting has not been adequately explored in a contemporary context. The growing popularity of more ‘modern’ theories, such as cognitive therapy, behaviourism, mindfulness, and positive psychology among others, combined with a postmodern cynicism which distrusts what is deemed to be Rogers’ “simplicity” and idealism, his overly positive view of human nature, and his lack of concern for the establishment of technique-driven dogmas, results in a polite reverence for the “gentle” humanist and a reluctance to explore an application of his person-centered approach to interpersonal relations in all contexts.¹⁹

The meta-narratives of human history are concerned with momentous or general developments, events, or progress. A distrust of the representative validity of these meta-narratives is a distinguishing characteristic of our post-modern world. Without the support of research and documentation, there is a felt realization that individual and personal narratives, often overlooked in the ‘bigger’ stories, are concerned with issues

which sometimes impact on the individual in private and unarticulated ways. The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh (2005) explores the nature of this paradox in his satirically titled short poem, "Epic":

I have lived in important places, times
When great events were decided: who owned
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land
Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims

...

That was the year of the Munich bother. Which
Was most important? (p. 184).

The story of the human being, and his/her concerns, cannot be categorized into any neat descriptions or definitions. However, certain experiences are almost universal in their occurrence, albeit in uniquely different forms and impacts. Experiences such as joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, and hope and despair are integral aspects of human life, beyond any boundaries of time or space. The personal and unique nature of these experiences means that they are often unshared and silent. However, the status quo, and its accepted limitations and assumptions, is sometimes challenged through the emergence of a brave and creative thinker who articulates and echoes feelings and thoughts, perspectives and horizons, hitherto unexplored; poets, philosophers, dreamers, and visionaries break the boundaries of private experience, and, in so doing, enlarge our understanding and perspective. Of course, history also reminds us that those who dare to think outside the confines of convention and habitual assumption are often greeted with ridicule and dismissal. Others are passively tolerated as being gentle but ineffective dreamers, divorced from the fixed realities of life. The legacy of such thinkers is volatile and subject to the vicissitudes of public opinion; the hero of today may be the scoundrel of tomorrow, but the dreamer of yesterday may yet be the sage that we need today. One such thinker is Carl Rogers. In referring to Rogers as a visionary and a revolutionary thinker, I am asserting the radical nature of his thought and theories in the context of his time, his challenging of conventional approaches to human understanding and human well-being, and his promotion of the significance of individual freedom and subjective perception. I am not attempting to idealize either the man or his theories; of course, there are critical questions pertaining to some of Rogers' ideas; of course, hindsight and ongoing research may be applied critically to his work. However, I nevertheless claim that a revisiting of Rogers' vision is timely in view of the tragic manifestations of failure in interpersonal relations in our contemporary world. Globally and locally, socially and personally, we are confronted with challenges and conflicts wherein the continuation of traditional methods seems doomed to a repetition of the failures of the past. Therefore, in the words of Brian Thorne (2003), "it seems that we do well to hear again the voice of a man who passionately believed in the capacity of humankind to transcend itself" (p. iix).

A philosophy of life: a way of being

The philosophy of Rogers, exploring questions of human being, human becoming, personhood, potential, and fulfilment, is ultimately positive and optimistic in its understanding of human nature. Rogers was committed to a belief in the innate goodness

and potential creativity of the human person, and his work is concerned with providing his personal vision of genuine relationship and its healing and growth-enhancing capacity. Throughout his writings, Rogers acknowledges the difficulties pertaining to the creation and maintenance of authenticity in an inter-subjective relationship; he admits his own momentary failures in this regard and he consistently reminds his readers that his theories are based on his own personal experience. Echoing the sentiments of the poet and philosopher John O'Donohue, he accepts the necessity of a courageous and imaginative encounter with ourselves and our world: "This process of the good life is not, I am convinced, a life for the faint-hearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life" (Rogers, 2004, p. 196).

The development of the "talking cure"

Many of the disturbing and challenging questions encountered by the individual arise out of, or are accompanied by, feelings of unease, distress, or self-doubt. Such questions may relate to one's purpose—"why am I here?"—one's self-worth—"am I worthwhile?"—and one's engagement with life—"how am I to create and live a meaningful and satisfactory life?" Answers to such questions are often ephemeral and volatile, but sometimes the perceived answers are predominantly negative and disarming. The individual may feel he/she has no purpose, has nothing to contribute, is not of value to self or to others and is unable to tolerate life as it presents itself. Mental distress and suffering is a widespread phenomenon and its extent and duration is diverse and unpredictable. Our vocabulary abounds with a variety of descriptions which attempt to define this uniquely subjective experience: depression, anxiety, stress, melancholia, hysteria, and madness—these are but some of the labels that have been associated with emotional and mental distress in the past century. The labels have been accompanied by diagnoses and prescriptions in attempts to understand and ameliorate the attendant suffering. Historically, this has been the almost exclusive domain of psychiatry and pharmacology. However, it is to the credit of the oft-maligned Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic theories that another approach has been made possible; the revolutionary idea that human distress could be addressed and alleviated through a relationship with an accepting, understanding, and attentive listener. Psychotherapy, "the talking cure," became a possibility.

The work of Freud was followed by many different developments in psychotherapeutic theories and techniques. People like Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Aaron Beck, Victor Frankl, and Abraham Maslow established different schools of psychotherapy framed by their own proclaimed understanding of human personality and development. From their ideas, we now have psychodynamic, existential, cognitive, and behavioural schools of therapy, each with their own set of techniques and approaches, while many independent psychotherapists draw freely and selectively from these diverse ideas and practice an integrative approach based on the unique needs and personality of the particular individual. This focus on the individual person, as distinct from universally applied techniques and theories, is the cornerstone of a "person-centred" approach developed by Rogers, both in his psychotherapeutic work and in his humanistic outlook.

The courage to be: genuine relationship

In his description of an effective therapeutic experience, Rogers put forward two concepts which have a relevance and an application outside the counselling setting. Indeed, Rogers increasingly argued for the relevance of his theories to non-therapeutic settings and claimed that they were applicable in the general experience of the individual in his/her world. Rogers considered that the main source of healing, change and growth ensued from the experience of genuine relationship between two people in any particular setting. This sentiment echoes the assertion of a philosopher who opposed many of Rogers' views; Martin Buber (1999), in his outline of the 'I-Thou' relationship and the dialogical nature of human relationships, claims that 'Everything is changed in real meeting' (p. 242). The necessary qualities of such a relationship, according to Rogers (2004), were realness, acceptance, and empathy in the person who assumed the caring or helping role: "The relationship which I have found helpful is characterized by a sort of transparency on my part, in which my real feelings are evident; by an acceptance of this other person as a separate person with value in his own right; and by a deep empathic understanding which enables me to see his private world through his eyes" (p. 34). The qualities of genuine relationship, as outlined by Rogers, are expressed and experienced through a courageous spontaneity and openness to the present moment, in contrast to a preoccupation with protective defences and fixed expectations. This understanding of vulnerable presence is essential to the experience of genuine relationship, or, in terms adopted by Buber (2004), the 'I-Thou' relationship: "In spite of all similarities every living situation has, like a newborn child, a new face, that has never been before and will never come again. It demands of you a reaction which cannot be prepared beforehand. It demands nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it demands you" (p. 135). In his outline of human relationships, Buber contrasts two different approaches and attitudes in the subject's encounter with existence. He contrasts the 'I-Thou' relationship of openness, mutuality, and presence with the more common mode of experience whereby the other is encountered as an object—'It'—without the intention of genuine connection. The former is the approach of genuine relation, dialogue, and love, and the pervasiveness of the latter is a serious obstacle to this experience. Buber accepts that the 'I-Thou' relationship, involving an unprejudiced openness to the encounter with other, was relatively rare in human relationships; instead, the general mode of relating tended to follow the 'I-It' formula, whereby the other is approached as an object, a source of utility on some level. However, Buber (2004a) insists on the absolute necessity of the 'I-Thou' relationship in the healthy development of the human being.²⁰ He insists that one cannot become a person by oneself, that life is essentially relational, and that "I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting" (p. 17). In many ways, these sentiments concur with Rogers' thoughts on the helpful and genuine relationship. Yet, how many of our encounters reflect this openness to the concrete experience of meeting the other? How often is a "meeting" choreographed by preconceived convictions regarding the self and the other, by habitual expectations and an impatient determination to convey our well-worn responses and asides? Commonly, we are deafened by our own monological musings and defensive performances, and, thus, we are not really present in the encounter. Perhaps this is one of the attractions of the ever-

growing popularity of “virtual” relationships and technology-mediated communication, which provide the space and distance to avoid spontaneity, vulnerability, and realness.²¹

Realness, congruence

The willingness to be real, to be “transparent,” to risk exposing oneself in all one’s vulnerabilities and strengths, is often in conflict with our perceived need to protect our public or even private image of ourselves, and thus we don an array of masks and disguises with a view to presenting a selective and limited version of ourselves. Often, it seems, we do not consider our real self to be quite good enough. It appears to be part of the phenomenon of human relationships that the behaviour of one individual tends to evoke a corresponding behaviour in the other partner of the encounter. It is as if we have an in-built mechanism which carefully measures how far we may advance, in openness and honesty, with another human being; indeed, we often experience greater freedom in self-expression when we address the safe and silent reception of the animal kingdom! Talking to the dog is usually characterized by an absence of inhibitions and fears. By contrast, many of our encounters with fellow human beings are diminished by our fears of being misunderstood, of being rejected and especially of being criticized or ridiculed. Hence, we often come away from an otherwise joyful and pleasant encounter with an uneasy and sometimes repressed feeling that there was something missing from the experience. There may be a felt sense that we can now relax, shed the armour, and be again ourselves without effort or performance; but there is also a vague sense of loneliness and disappointment, which we try to shrug off. Realness involves the courage and risk of being open to all aspects of the self, dispensing with the habitual armour with which we often attempt to mask our vulnerability. This is “the art of being,” according to O’Donohue (2003): “To learn that art of being is to become free of the burden of strategy, purpose and self-consciousness” (p. 229). Very often, the experience of realness and vulnerability in one individual creates a hitherto suppressed freedom of genuine expression and being in another. O’Donohue, suggests that the risk involved in such authenticity unlocks a similar potential in others: “Those who are willing to stand out and take the risk of following their gift place a mirror to our unawakened gifts” (p. 247). When I am real in a relationship, the other person is encouraged to be, even tentatively, open and authentic in response. The experience of real connection and communication alleviates the loneliness that we all share. In this experience, we come to realize that what separates and makes us different is less intrinsic than what we share. Rogers believes that our relationships, and our lives, are enriched through our willingness to risk exposing our imperfect selves, our faults as well as our virtues, our failures as well as our successes, and our confusion and sadness as well as our confidence and joy. To be human is to be imperfect, and, in some ways, it is our imperfections that contribute most significantly to our uniqueness and to the core of our potential contribution to the joy and well-being of others. As Leonard Cohen (1993) reminds us, “There is a crack in everything / That’s how the light gets in” (p. 373). Perfection and human is a contradiction, and our imperfections are an intrinsic part of who we are. Yet, an ideology of perfection appears to permeate so many aspects of our lives today: images of the perfect body, the perfect parent, the perfect school, and the perfect child are often portrayed against the backdrop

of the perfect beach, the perfect home, the perfect car, and the perfect life. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (2003), in his typically aphoristic style, claims that “the wickedest in man is necessary for the best in him” (p. 235). Rogers (2004), who had a very positive view of human nature, seeing all human beings as potentially striving for self-actualization, suggests that we are good enough without being perfect: “What I am is good enough if I would only be it openly” (p. 67). The acknowledgement that we are “good enough” lies at the heart of self-acceptance and acts as counter-voice to critical reprimands and demands for improvement emanating internally or externally from diverse sources of perceived authority and expertise. It is also, in my view, an acknowledgement of the imperfection and ambiguity characteristic of the human condition, an acknowledgement which does not dispel the possibility of optimism and confidence in human nature. The poet Mary Oliver (2005) echoes Roger’s words:

You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves...
The world offers itself to your imagination. (p. 110)

Unconditional Acceptance

The willingness to accept both self and other exactly as one is at a particular moment is the second characteristic of a genuine relationship according to Rogers (2004). Acceptance entails an appreciation of the person as he/she is without the need or desire to change or improve: “In my early professional years I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?” (p. 32). Genuine relationship is not concerned with changing or fixing the other according to some perceived image of how the other might be. It is accepting of the reality of other and of the self without the application of conditions of worth: “The more I am open to the realities in me and in the other person, the less do I find myself rushing in to ‘fix things’” (p. 21). The desire to “fix” things or people implies a degree of dismissal or non-acceptance of some essential aspects of our relational experience. In some sense, the other is not considered “good enough.” How many adults struggle with feelings of worthlessness and confusion because of mixed-messages received from well-meaning care-givers, advisers or educators? Such messages are often interpreted as an assessment of failure on some level; a failure to fulfil the conditions dictated by “expert opinion” or a failure to measure up to the expectations and requirements of some perceived authority. Full acceptance and appreciation of an individual is free of this need to control or re-make. (This applies to counselling and psychotherapy too!) Rogers (1996) suggests it is akin to an attitude of awe which we often experience when confronted with the majesty and beauty of nature: “One of the most satisfying experiences I know is fully to appreciate an individual in the same way I appreciate a sunset. When I look at a sunset... I don't find myself saying, 'Soften the orange a little more on the right hand corner, and put a bit more purple along the base, and use a little more pink in the cloud colour...' I don't try to control a sunset. I watch it with awe as it unfolds” (p. 22). When this attitude is

experienced in a genuine relationship, it prompts a greater degree of openness and realness. Rogers (2003) claims that “The more fully the individual is understood and accepted, the more he tends to drop the false fronts with which he has been meeting life” (p. 28). This experience of being unconditionally accepted by another is often echoed by an ability to accept oneself. Self-acceptance is the key to change, according to Rogers: “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change” (p. 19). Hence, unconditional acceptance facilitates the emergence and the strengthening of the real self and a gradual diminishment of the need for façade or mask. The ideal source of unconditional acceptance is of course in the milieu of one’s earliest years; however, fears of “spoiling,” “over-indulging,” and not being the “perfect parent” often translate into a heavy “hands-on” approach to parenting wherein an attempt is made to “mould” the child into a “successful” citizen. The tragedy of this approach is often poignantly understood by grandparents, who, with the blessing of hindsight and the grace of long experience, sense the folly of such thinking and attempt to redress such conditionality with their grand-children.

Emphatic listening

The third characteristic of genuine relationship, in Rogerian terms, is the capacity to listen emphatically to the other person. In many conversations, “speaking” is the dominant mode; “the listener” is often preoccupied with “listening” to his/her own reactions or with the preparation of a well-received response. The willingness and ability to listen to another, to what is articulated verbally and to what is being conveyed beyond the words, is a rare and difficult phenomenon. Yet it is a major human need often expressed indirectly through a range of behaviours; the toddler’s tantrum, the adolescent rebellion, binge drinking, and self-harm are so often the disguised cravings for attentive listening. Listening requires a concentrated attention to the world of the other. Rogers (1996) explains that it involves hearing not only the thoughts and feelings which are being expressed but also the personal meanings and the complex inner world of the individual:

I hear the words, the thoughts, the feeling tones, the personal meaning, even the meaning that is below the conscious intent of the speaker. Sometimes too, in a message which superficially is not very important, I hear a deep human cry that lies buried and unknown far below the surface of the person. So I have learned to ask myself, can I hear the sounds and sense the shape of this other person's inner world? Can I resonate to what he is saying so deeply that I sense the meanings he is afraid of, yet would like to communicate, as well as those he knows?” (p. 8).

Do we hear “a deep human cry” buried below the surface of cliché and repetition? “I am fine,” “life is great,” “no worries” are often the expected responses to vague expressions of interest and concern. Do we take the time to hear what is not being said? Embedded in this description of emphatic listening is the core concept of care or solicitude for the other person; such a caring attitude implies the patience, the humility, and the openness required to listen attentively to another and to convey that the other’s experience, both verbally expressed and silently communicated, has been heard and understood. This is an

essential characteristic of “true friendship” according to O’Donohue (1999): “One of the tasks of true friendship is to listen compassionately and creatively to the hidden silences” (p. 145). It is also an intrinsic expression of respect for the other’s point of view, the possibility of different horizons and the welcome embrace of difference, which is often so blatantly absent in our reception of those whom we consider “strangers” or “foreigners.”

Songs, poems, and films often express the universal need to be heard and understood. In early childhood, we enter into the world of language in order to communicate our needs and reactions. We crave a response which signals that we have been listened to. This kind of attention is essential to our development as human beings. Rogers (1998) claims that an experience of attentive listening enables an enhancement of one’s perspective on oneself and on one’s world, and this enlarged perspective opens new possibilities and new understanding: “When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in a new way and to go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens, how confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard. I have deeply appreciated the times that I have experienced this sensitive, empathic, concentrated listening” (p. 13). Our desire, our need, to be listened to in this attentive manner is often thwarted by the inevitable distractions which characterize our personal encounters; the contemporary obsession with the cell-phone is but one example of the intrusions which punctuate our conversations and relationships. Of course, we rarely admit our annoyance when our companion prioritizes the ring-tone of the phone over what is being communicated in person! On a more serious level, the need to listen and the need to be heard lie at the root of many tragedies and problems in our contemporary world. Behind many of the manifest causes of marital disharmony and breakdown is the often unarticulated craving to be listened to and understood; the ever-growing spectre of suicide suggests that we are not hearing the cries of anguish and despair of our fellow human beings; and the historical failure to create and maintain world peace, justice, and equality is a direct result of our failure to listen emphatically to the perspective of the other.

Self-actualization

According to Rogers (2003), when these three conditions of genuine relationship are present in an encounter with an individual, the result is a spontaneous surge towards growth and healing. With the right conditions, the individual, like all living organisms, flourishes and moves towards self-actualization: “The individual has within himself/herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behaviour” (p. 135). Rogers points to the analogy of the acorn, which, under the right conditions, grows naturally towards the actualization of an oak tree.²² This portrays a very positive view of the human being wherein the potential for growth, maturity, and actualization is inherent in the individual; the flourishing of this potential is dependent on the quality of relational experience in the person’s life.²³ Relationships involving varying degrees of judgement, criticism, rejection, or abuse hinder or diminish the possibility of growth. Similarly, relationships based on unconditional acceptance, regard, and empathy have the power to unleash the hidden or

repressed thrust towards development and maturity. As relational or social beings, we are vulnerable to the effects of damaging relationships, but we are also responsive to the healing effects of genuine connection.

The Fully Functioning Person

Rogers (2003) describes the individual who has experienced the congruence, acceptance and understanding present in a genuine relationship as a “fully functioning person”²⁴ (p. 250). The concept of a “fully functioning person” may have associations with “perfect” maturity, “perfect” living and “perfect” functioning; therefore, perhaps a more acceptable description might be “the contented person.” According to Rogers, this individual is not “perfect” or complete; living is synonymous with growth and change: it is a never-ending process. Accepting this reality, the “fully functioning person” has “unconditional self-worth and self-regard.” Self-worth, self-regard, and self-esteem are not dependent on transient or volatile external sources such as personal or vocational success, popularity, or favour, but are based on an acknowledgement of one’s incontestable worthiness as a human being. This is accompanied by an increasing development of self-trust and self-direction whereby one has the confidence and courage to choose one’s own values and actions. Authentic choices are made based on an openness to the full spectrum of one’s feelings, doing what “feels right” (p. 414). One’s life is created in a positive response to the question: “Am I living in a way which is deeply satisfying to me, and which truly expresses me?” (Rogers, 2004, p. 119). Rogers considers this “the only question which matters”. On this point, Rogers’ theory has been criticized for its extreme individualism and corresponding self-indulgence. The counter-argument is that this subjective freedom to choose how to live one’s life is inevitably accompanied by a corresponding appreciation of the freedom of others to choose their own ways and an acceptance of what Rogers (2003) maintains is “a basic fact of all human life that we live in separate realities” (p. 428). Reciprocal tolerance and respect result in harmony at personal, social, and political levels and Rogers suggests that this attitude may be a viable and urgent alternative to conventional responses to conflict and difference. This could apply in personal, political and economic realms of experience.

Criticisms

Roger’s theories of personality and development have been criticized for what is perceived as their overly-optimistic understanding of human behaviour. It is argued that Rogers does not sufficiently take into account the reality of evil in our world. Noted humanistic and existentialist philosophers and psychologists such as Buber and May have argued that Rogers’ view of human nature is naïve, utopian, and one-sided; where Rogers sees the human being as “basically good” these thinkers assert that we are both good and bad and that it is never certain that human development, even within Rogers’ ideal conditions, will result in positive and life-enhancing growth. Perhaps we can interpret Rogers’ phrase “basically good” as an acceptance by Rogers of the ambiguity and the complexity of the human condition. Perhaps, also, we tend to find in human nature that which we believe it to be. Rogers has also been criticized for his promotion of individualism and self-love

leading to the possibility of dangerous narcissism. His emphasis on individual experience and perception and the avoidance of external evaluation is deemed relativistic and even nihilistic with regard to morality, truth and goodness. It is certainly opposed to any conception of “expert” knowledge or any version of dogmatic authority.²⁵ Surely, this is a good thing?

Conclusion

Perhaps Roger’s vision is idealistic and difficult to actuate in practice; it is one thing to “know” what his theories are, and another to put them into practice. However, the difficulty of the task perhaps mirrors the enormity of its significance. Unless we try, we cannot succeed. Perhaps Rogers’ vision is based on an unconventionally compassionate view of human nature. However, we cannot live without dreams and ideals, we cannot move forward without a glimpse of what might be, and we cannot afford to dismiss the ideals of “the quiet revolutionary” without at least considering the possibility that in the imperfect striving towards their realization may lie a better way forward in all aspects of human relationships. As O’Donohue (2003) reminds us, a commitment to ideals is compatible with an acknowledgement of imperfection and brokenness: “The beauty of the true ideal is its hospitality towards woundedness, weakness, failure and fall-back” (O’Donohue, p. 191). We are all wounded and weak in some respects, and, therefore, we are all in need of better, more genuine and more enriching relationships with our fellow human beings. Perhaps it is time to revisit the ideals of “the quiet revolutionary”! As Thorne (2003) warns, “Rogers is even more a man for our times whose prophetic insight we ignore at our peril” (p. ix).

REFERENCES

- Buber, M. (2004). *Between man and man*. New York: Routledge Classics.
- Buber, M. (2004a). *I and Thou*. London: Continuum.
- Cain, D. (1993). The uncertain future of client-centered counseling. *Humanistic Education and Development*, 31, 134–139.
- Cohen, L. (1993). *Stranger music*. London: Random House.
- Deurzen, van E. (2002). *Existential counselling and psychotherapy in practice*. London: Sage.
- Kavanagh, P. (2005). *Collected poems*. London: Penguin Classics.
- May, R. (1982). The Problem of Evil: An open letter to Carl Rogers. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Volume 22, Issue 3, pp. 10–21.
- Nietzsche, F. (1984). *Human, all too human*. Translated by Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 1998. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Maudmarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen. Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Nietzsche, F. (2003). *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.
- O’Donohue, J. (1999). *Anam cara: Spiritual wisdom from the Celtic world*. New York: Bantam Press.

- O'Donohue, J. (2003). *Divine beauty: The invisible embrace*. New York: Bantam Press.
- Oliver, M. (2005). *New and selected poems, volume one*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Patterson, C. H. (1993). Winds of change for client-centered counseling. *Humanistic Education and Development*, 31, 130–133.
- Rogers, C. (1982). Notes on Rollo May. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Volume 22, Issue 3, pp. 8–9.
- Rogers, C. (1996). *A way of being*. London: Houghton Mufflin.
- Rogers, C. (2003). *The Carl Rogers reader* (eds. Howard Kirschenbaum and Valerie Land Henderson). London: Constable.
- Rogers, C. (2004). *On becoming a person*. London: Constable.
- Thorne, B. (2003). *Carl Rogers (Key figures in counselling and psychotherapy)*, 2nd Edition. London: Sage.
- Žižek, S. (1999). *The Žižek reader*. Eds. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Žižek, S. (2001). The one measure of true love is: You can insult the other". *Lacan.Com*, accessed 14/2/07.
- Žižek, S. (2006). Freud lives! *London Review of Books*. accessed 10/2/07.

¹⁸ I am grateful for the helpful comments and recommendations of Eddy Elmer in his review of this article in its original draft. This present, revised, version owes much to Eddy's insights.

¹⁹ In 1993, the journal *Humanistic Education and Development* published an interesting debate on the decline of client-centered counselling, particularly in the United States. Two of the contributors, C. H. Patterson and David J. Cain, offered differing opinions regarding the source of this decline; Patterson argued for a resistance to ad-hoc changes to the basic tenets of Rogers' approach while Cain suggested that this attitude of "unquestioning faith" had been hostile to evolution and development within the theory and practice of client-centered psychotherapy. Patterson asserted his personal commitment to Rogers' approach; Cain (1993) outlined what he perceived as some of the failings in Rogers' theory: "Rogers' theory of personality and psychotherapy is an elegant but rudimentary theory that barely addressed the issue of how personality develops. It provided very little help in understanding the wide varieties of disturbing and pathological behaviours ... that render people dysfunctional in varying degrees" (p. 134). However, this debate was confined to an assessment of Rogers's theories within the counselling setting and did not address the value of these theories in the wider, non-psychotherapeutic world.

²⁰ Buber (2004a) argues that when we allow the "I-It" way of viewing the world to dominate our thinking and actions, we are spiritually emaciated and pauperized, and our lives are a narrow reflection of what they could be. The potential of the human being, and his/her potential relationship with his/her world, is thus restricted and distorted: "The fulfilment of this nature and disposition is thwarted by the man who has come to terms with the world of *It* that it is to be experienced and used. For now instead of freeing that which is bound up in that world he suppresses it, instead of looking at it he observes it, instead of accepting it as it is, he turns it to his own account" (p. 37).

²¹ The contemporary theorist and psychoanalyst, Slavoj Žižek (2001), offers an ironic commentary on the lack of "realness" in our contemporary lives: "in a digitalised universe that is artificially constructed ... we seem to live more and more with the thing deprived of its substance" (etext). Žižek (1999) refers to the myriad forms of interpassivity whereby even emotions are experienced indirectly, as in canned laughter, mock horror, and the many adult variations on the Japanese toy, *tamagochi*, where feelings of love and care are delegated to inanimate objects: "*tamagochi* is a machine which allows you to satisfy your need to love your neighbour ... without bothering your actual neighbours with your intrusive compassion" (p. 109). Thus, Žižek (2006) believes that "in our 'society of the spectacle', in which what we experience as everyday reality more and more takes the form of the lie made real, Freud's insights show their true value" (etext).

²² The analogy between human and plant organisms is rejected by many of Rogers' critics who claim that

even if the analogy applies to physiological potential and maturation it has no validity in relation to emotional, mental, or psychological growth.

²³ Rogers' optimistic and positive view of human nature has been criticized for its failure to take into account the reality of evil and its myriad manifestations throughout history. This issue was the subject of an open correspondence between Rogers and Rollo May, published in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Volume 22, Issue 3, pp. 8–21.

²⁴ The existentialist corollary of the concept of “fully-functioning” may be the concept of “authenticity.” However, some existentialist philosophers differentiate between their conception of the human being and personality development and that of the humanistic approach. One such philosopher is Emmy van Deurzen (2002), who, echoing Rogers' stance, outlines the difference thus: “Humanistic approaches perceive human beings as basically positive creatures who develop constructively, given the right conditions. The existential position is that people may evolve in any direction, good or bad, and that any reflection on what constitutes good or bad makes it possible to exercise one's choice in the matter” (pp. 50–51).

²⁵ The question of morality, and its external and subjective origins, continues to be a subject of philosophical debate. In what is considered his most controversial work, *The Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche (2003) provides a critique of morality, values, and philosophy. In calling for a re-valuation of all morals, Nietzsche brings into question common assumptions regarding accepted values and moral virtues which have been extolled and encouraged as being inherent to human nature. He rejects the assumption that these virtues are inherent to human nature or that they are natural to humankind, and he disputes any absolutist conception of morality. Rather, Nietzsche (1984) argues that “values” and codes of morality are “in a continual state of fluctuation” (p. 53), and he (Nietzsche, 2003) seeks to expose the cultural and historical relativity of our values, crucially our moral values, and “the utility which dominates moral value-judgements” (p. 122).

For an interesting and contemporary discussion of the question of morality, see the debate ongoing in the magazine *Philosophy Now*, Issues 81 and 82.