
In mid-December, 1985, it was my good fortune to escape the cold winds of Pittsburgh for the warm sunshine of Phoenix to attend the Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference. More than 7,000 professionals, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, etc. had congregated to see and hear the megastars of psychotherapy: Bruno Bettelheim, R.D. Laing, Albert Ellis, Thomas Szasz, Joseph Wolpe, Rollo May, Jay Haley, Virginia Satir and many more. Time Magazine’s (December 23, 1985, p. 59) report of the event described it as “part tradeshow, part ecumenical conference”, and quoted the conference’s organizer, Jeffrey Zeig’s reference to the “great ballet of differences” in the field of psychotherapy and Wolpe’s labeling it “a babble of conflicting voices.”

Shortly after my return from the conference, I began this review. As I read chapter after chapter about new directions in client-centered therapy and the person-centered approach, the question kept haunting me; who was on target about the current status of psychotherapy, Zeig or Wolpe? Is it a “great ballet of differences” or just “a babble of conflicting voices?” The issue can be crystallized in the editors’ introductory discussion of the basic goodness of human nature, an old and central concern of client-centered therapy. At the conference in Phoenix, Carl Rogers had passionately reaffirmed his unqualified belief in the essential goodness of human nature. With eyes wide open to the reality that human beings are capable of great evil, he still repudiated the tradition that claims human nature to be essentially corrupt. It came as a surprise then, to find the editors of this book rejecting Rogers’ position and opting for an ontological mélange: “We are basically both good and bad . . . (p. 3)” . The essential goodness of the human person has always been a foundational belief for Rogers and for client-centered therapy. To modify or reject this faith-conviction with such apparent ease, as Levant and Shlien seem to do, only adds to the babble of confusion. This is no small matter for the future of client-centered therapy. Rogers’ profound belief in the essential goodness of the human person nourished many of the central client-centered assumptions;
absolute respect for the dignity and worth of the individual and unconditional positive regard spring spontaneously to mind. To substitute a fundamental assumption of the potential to change in no way distinguishes client-centered therapy. Rogers was always more optimistic and he imbued his therapy with a boundless faith in the human potential. That faith in the goodness of the human being and the capacity for growth, wedded to total acceptance, prizing and understanding, characterizes the work of Rogers far better than any method or technique. Research cannot adequately address these issues. Perhaps that is why psychotherapy continues to be a babble of conflicting positions. In the case of client-centered therapy, this tension and conceptual confusion can be related in part to Rogers' original inspiration.

In his description of the "soil of the theory", Rogers recounts how, at the age of twelve, when his family moved to a farm, he became deeply interested in scientific agriculture, read deeply in the field and thus gained a "deep and abiding respect for the scientific method as a means of solving problems and creating new advances in knowledge" (1959, p. 186). This respect for the scientific method was only reinforced during his college years by his fondness for the physical and biological sciences. Rogers' predeliction for the scientific method, or more precisely his efforts to make psychotherapy a theoretical science, incites Heaton (1976) to take him somewhat harshly to task.

We can only note that his "descriptions" are replete with ethical notions, most of which are as old as ethics itself. They are not really descriptions that depict anything in the world but describe Rogers' world of evaluation ... Rogers has not the courage to take a moral stand himself, he has to say it is based on science. (p. 83)

Heaton's criticism takes on particular significance in the context of Rogers' personal religious history. Rogers tells us that he grew up in a highly conservative (almost fundamentalist) Protestant family, but having rejected the family religion, became interested in more modern religious thought and finally moved away from the church altogether. Still the religious-ethical commitment perdured in his psychotherapy together with an almost religious faith in the power of empirical science.

In various ways and to various degrees, many of the articles in Client-centered therapy and the person-centered approach reflect this Rogerian faith/science ambiguity. For example, Neil Watson (Chapter 2) examines the current empirical status of Rogers' hypotheses of the necessary and