

Carl Rogers' Crisis

Subjectivity vs. Objectivity



Ovide Bastien

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In memory of Father Emmett 'Pops' Johns – he passed away on January 13, 2018 – who reached out for decades to Montreal's homeless youth, adopting an attitude of non-judgmental and unconditional welcome, empathy and confidence.

In memory of Father Sylvio Ducharme and all the other Oblates of Mary Immaculate who guided and trained me in my youth.

To my love, Danielle, who knows how to welcome life with open arms, especially children, and whose listening skills are so impressive.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJqi5bSLN0c>

Christ Dayo from the CHRY News Collective interviewed me in late September 2014. To listen to this half-hour radio interview on the Chilean Coup:

<https://www.mixcloud.com/discover/ovide-bastien/>

To see my 5-minute 2014 homage (mostly in French) to Sister Marie Denise Dubois, a woman who dedicated her life to the marginalized in Chile and Honduras:

Marie Denise Dubois ou l'autre visage de l'Église :
<https://vimeo.com/105806912>

To see the presentation that I made on Chile – I was invited by the Egyptian Canadian Coalition for Democracy – during the World Social Forum in Montreal on 10 August 2016:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2YsYG0lzVU> (The talk is in French)

Foreword

When I was preparing to become a priest and missionary fifty-two years ago – I was then 23 years old and living in Ottawa – I wrote two memoirs in view of my master's degree in philosophy. The first memoir was on the American psychotherapist Carl Rogers and the second one was on the French philosopher Aimé Forest.

To avoid the solitude often experienced by those writing theses, my fellow seminarian Léo Boudreau and I had agreed to study the same two authors for our memoirs. Each one of us would of course focus on a different aspect, but the fact of researching the same two authors would allow us the opportunity, we felt, to always have someone, besides our thesis director, with whom we could share what we were learning, including our doubts, our questions, etc. And someone who really had considerable knowledge about and interest in the subject of our thesis.

While writing our memoirs from September 1965 to May 1966, Leo and I lived with the Oblate priests and brothers who were managing the Résidence Sacré Cœur – a residence for high school students who were contemplating the priesthood – and also taking care of the Sacred Heart Parish Church located across the street.

Leo loved playing the guitar and singing – and he excelled in both – and we would often accompany students from the University of Ottawa in various events, mainly weekend retreats. Leo and I would also accompany the Oblate pastor of the Sacred Heart Parish, doing everything we could to liven up and animate the daily masses.

TODAY, WITH THE HINDSIGHT that more than half a century allows me to have, I am very impressed by the fact that the worldviews underlying Carl Rogers' person-centered therapy and Aimé Forest's philosophical

approach, which are strikingly similar in fundamental respects, remain not only very relevant in 2018, but also, in my opinion, *urgently so*.

I am also very impressed by the fact that these two worldviews have much in common with the indigenous worldview, which many environmentalists – such as Naomi Klein and David Suzuki for example – are presently arguing we must adopt in order to cope with ever-more threatening climate change. Much in common also with the worldview that the renowned and recently deceased Catholic theologian Gregory Baum, who was one of the experts for the Vatican II reforms, argues we must adopt to bridge the gap between people of different religious beliefs. Much in common, finally, with the worldview that the world's most renowned protagonist of non-violence Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi argues we should adopt to address social justice and other basic issues.

In what follows – Part I – I will briefly point out why I consider that the worldview underlying Carl Rogers person-centered therapy has much in common with that of Aimé Forest, that of the indigenous, that of Gregory Baum, and that of Gandhi; I will explain why I consider it extremely important to continue advocating these common worldviews in 2018; and I will argue that these worldviews, to which I was exposed in my youth, have proven to be a blessing for me as an educator.

Secondly – Part II – I will reproduce the memoir that I wrote in fall 1965 on Carl Rogers. In this memoir I first presented the fundamental aspects of Rogers' person-centered approach in psychotherapy, and then discussed, at length and with considerable detail, the intellectual conflict between subjectivity and objectivity that Rogers experienced during his career. Finally, I critically evaluated from a philosophical and epistemological perspective the solution he came up with.

Finally – Epilogue 2018 – I will deepen and expand, but only very briefly, the above critical evaluation of the solution Rogers found to address the conflict he experienced between subjective and objective knowing.

I would invite those readers who are interested in philosophical issues and thus would like to further explore the philosophical underpinnings of my critique of Carl Rogers' views on subjectivity and objectivity, to consult my book *Life of the Mind According to Aimé Forest*. In this book I reproduce the thesis I wrote on the French philosopher Forest and also a long personal reflection that I wrote in less than one week in January 1966, a reflection that represents my effort to put down on paper and clarify what then appeared to me as some of the most fundamental issues in philosophy: what it means to know, the difference between sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge, and the contributions of some of the world's greatest philosophers to the search for the unity and meaning of being.

This latter reflection, which is meditative and contains considerable repetition, was part of my diary and was not written in order to be published. To most readers, especially those who are not familiar with the history of philosophy, it undoubtedly will appear somewhat taxing and sometimes too repetitive.

Its value and interest originate, I believe, from the fact that it is very personal, very sincere and passionate, and reflects the kind of education many of us were receiving as future priests back in the 1960s.

This reflection also sheds light on the philosophical implications of the worldviews referred to above – that of Carl Rogers, Aimé Forest, Gandhi, Gregory Baum, and the indigenous – and, more fundamentally, on what remains for each and every one of us a forever unfinished task: the quest for the meaning of life and the universe.

Part I - Carl Rogers' worldview: one we urgently need to adopt

In his books and articles Carl Rogers presents the worldview underlying his client-centered approach in therapy. He argues that the therapist must be congruent and empathic, and adopt an attitude of unconditional positive regard towards his client (To express this attitude of unconditional positive regard, Rogers sometimes uses the term 'care'; however, he avoids using the word 'love' because of the superficial connotation this expression has taken in our culture). That in the therapeutic relationship one must be *client*-centered and not *theory*-centered. That when all this happens, both therapist and client will often live a kind of mystical experience akin to ecstasy. That when all this happens the client will learn to open up, to reconnect to deep emotions, to allow previously blocked experiences to enter the field of awareness, to reinterpret experiences that had been allowed to awareness but only with a distorted meaning, and to start evaluating all such experiences from his or her own locus of evaluation. And also, and very importantly, start discovering the root cause of his or her problems, start finding solutions, and choose positive and very promising orientations.

Aimé Forest's main passion as a philosopher – I read most of his books, most of his articles and several of his book reviews – consists in examining the nature of being, but, also and more importantly, *in exploring the attitude that one must adopt in order to be able to connect in depth to being*, to be one with being and to discover its fundamental unity and meaning. This happens, he argues, when one is able to meditatively focus on that which is fundamental in one's encounter with individual beings, that which allows one to touch what is *at once absolutely unique and*

absolutely universal in both things and persons. When one is able to consent to being... (le consentement à l'être). Welcoming being with open arms, with confidence and benevolence, and experiencing what he calls the intuition of being.

Two experiences par excellence according to Forest that allows one to experience the intuition of being: that of beauty, in which there exists a kind of mystical correspondence or harmony between beholder and beholden; a thing of beauty is a joy forever (John Keats)! And that of love, in which the person loving and the person loved experience each other's absolute uniqueness – the discovery of the other in depth coinciding with the discovery of oneself in depth – but, *in and through that very same uniqueness of the other, also experience universality and totality*. You mean the whole world to me!...

Impact of Carl Rogers and Aimé Forest on my life as an educator

Both Rogers and Forest have had a profound impact on my entire life. In my teaching of philosophy for four years after I abandoned the idea of becoming a priest and left the seminary, and later in my teaching of economics from 1978 to 2010.

In 1993 I co-founded North South Studies, a social science profile at Dawson College that involves a considerable amount of extracurricular activities, including a one-month annual student field trip to Nicaragua.

The talking circles, especially those that take place during the field trip, represent the heart and soul of North South Studies. Carl Rogers' influence, as well as the various experiences of group dynamics that I had on weekend retreats with the young during my training in the seminary,

certainly contributed to the establishment of talking circles as a North South Studies tradition, one that continues to this very day.¹ For years each field trip to Nicaragua was preceded by a pre-trip weekend at my cottage located next to a lake in Entrelacs, in the Laurentian Mountains.

Students and teachers often live, in these talking circles, a kind of mystical experience akin to ecstasy, similar to what happens, according to Rogers, in the relationship between therapist and client.

I remember when, a mere three weeks before we were departing for Nicaragua, one of our student field trip participants had tried to commit suicide. All the participants knew about this but they had generously accepted that she nevertheless come on the trip, however challenging that may be, given that the psychotherapist who treated her had made that recommendation. Needless to say, the talking circles and bonds created on that trip were particularly profound, intense, and unforgettable.

For the course *Economic Development*, which I taught to North South Studies students for several years, I wrote a class manual [CHILE: Underside of Economic Miracle](#) that included a case study of Chile. The manual also included numerous excerpts of the diary and letters I wrote when I experienced the coup of 11 September 1973 and the first

¹ One of our North South students was indigenous. He was from the Maniwaki Indian reserve of Maniwaki. He was very accustomed to talking circles in his community and taught us how to use a small object – a small stick, a pencil, an eraser – to facilitate our communication. The person talking would hold the object and pass it on to another person when she or he was done talking. The golden rule: only the person holding the object was allowed to talk. All others were to listen in depth. Not search to contradict or disagree with the person talking, but search to be caring and empathic.

Another one of our students, Kahlil Baker, taught us group hugs, especially as a way of harmoniously ending our talking circles. In North South Studies, faculty tend to be very close to students, especially during field trips. Hugs are part and parcel of the North South Studies' tradition.

year that followed it. Aimé Forest's influence, a philosopher who, as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, insisted that one connects to being primarily by relating in depth to individuals and not through categories, however scientific these may be, stands out loud and clear in this manual. In explaining why I chose to use a case study approach, I write:

“If the course is about developing nations, then why concentrate so much on only one of these? Why focus on Chile? Does knowledge of the many not provide a lot more than knowledge of the particular? Antoine de Saint-Exupéry emphasizes the importance of knowledge of the particular: “*L’important, c’est la rose*”.² In other words, what matters the most is how I connect to the world. I cannot obtain a good understanding of the world simply by categorizing things. The businessperson may reduce reality to profit opportunities. The power-thirsty ruler may reduce reality to subjects to be dominated. The scientist may see numbers and abstract categories wherever he or she looks. However, *I can really connect to the world, argues Saint-Exupéry, only when I can develop a relationship with someone in such a way that I am receptive to that person’s uniqueness. I can discover more about flowers in the world by relating in depth, with an attitude of openness and receptivity, to one single flower, than by trying to study all the flowers in the world through some particular abstract category.*”

² In English: “What matters is the rose”. See his book, *Le Petit Prince*, Editions Gallimard, 1946.

Similar worldviews: Carl Rogers, Aimé Forest, Gregory Baum, Indigenous, Gandhi

While writing [*Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*](#) in February 2016, I read and systematically analyzed Naomi Klein's very impressive book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. Climate*. I also read and analyzed Pope Francis' remarkable encyclical on the environment [*Praise Be To You*](#). An encyclical that the Canadian internationally renowned environmentalist David Suzuki found so touching and profound that he broke into tears when reading it.

Both Klein and Pope Francis argue, as most environmentalists do, that we must radically alter our worldview.

This same point had also been forcefully made by the United Nation's Bruntland Report in 1987 and by the renowned American environmentalist Bruce Rich in his 1994 book *Mortgaging the Earth: The World Bank, Environmental Impoverishment, and the Crisis of Development*. In the latter Rich asserts that the patron saint of the extractivist mindset is Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who, in the spirit of the ongoing Scientific Revolution, viewed nature, and indeed also human nature, as an object that could eventually become completely knowable and controllable. In this worldview, nature appears as some kind of global machine that man, through ever greater knowledge and manipulation, can subordinate to his own purposes.

Both Klein and Pope Francis argue that we should abandon the Bacon mindset and adopt the worldview of the indigenous. In other words *stop viewing nature as a thing to dominate and exploit, and see it instead as the source of all life and as a mother or sister*. What can save us from climate change, they argue, is going back to the indigenous worldview according to which we are one with nature. We

must welcome nature, accept our dependence on it, consent to its rhythms and rules.

It is because of their worldview, argues Klein, that the indigenous are at the forefront of the many ongoing battles throughout the world to preserve the environment. A worldview that they have kept alive “in the face of the bulldozers of colonialism and corporate globalization”, leading the struggle “for the reproductive rights of the planet as a whole – for the decapitated mountains, the drowned valleys, the clear-cut forests, the fracked water tables, the strip-mined hillsides, the poisoned rivers, the ‘cancer’ villages”.

And Pope Francis, at the very beginning of his encyclical, quotes Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) whose name he adopted. Saint Francis related to the planet earth as a sister or mother and spoke to plants and animals, treating them with awe, love, and respect, asserts Pope Francis.

On October 29, 2017 I chatted on the phone with Lise Labarre, a friend of mine who is a member of the religious community [Daughters of St. Paul](#).

“Yesterday I attended the funeral of [Gregory Baum](#). It was an amazingly beautiful funeral. You should have seen all the people who attended and paid tribute to him. Virtually all of the Christian left of Montreal was present in the Church of Saint-Pierre-Apôtre. Beautiful singing and moments of long, profound and very meaningful silence,” Lise told me.

In the minutes that followed our conversation I purchased Gregory Baum's spiritual autobiography [The Oil Has Not Run Dry: The Story of My Theological Pathway](#). I devoured this book, which Baum published one year ago – he was then 93 years old, and read it in less than 24 hours.

Baum was a well-known theologian, a man of the intellectual stamina of other renowned theologians such as Karl Rahner and Hans Küng. Like that of the latter, his influence on the Vatican II reforms initiated in the Catholic Church by Pope John XXIII in 1962 was substantial.

Baum was a staunch promoter of ecumenism. Someone who constantly prioritized broad thinking, mutual respect, and dialogue; who welcomed the contribution of intellectuals of all schools of thought. At a time when most in the Catholic Church held that outside of Catholicism there was no salvation, Baum argued that Jews, Protestants, Muslims, Hindus, and the indigenous need not convert to Catholicism to save their souls. When people of various creeds and worldviews learn to respect one another, he said, when they abandon the attitude – I am all right and you are all wrong! – and enter into dialogue with an attitude of benevolence and confidence, change occurs. Bonds develop and with them new openings, new insights, and ever-growing mutual respect. People discover that deep down more things unite than separate them.

Not surprisingly, Baum welcomed the nomination of Pope Francis with joy and relief. Similarly to Baum, Pope Francis also promotes ecumenism and argues that what is important is not the imposition on someone of a bulk of dogmas and rules, but rather putting into practice the main evangelical values: love, welcoming, and compassion. Prioritizing dogmas and rules, asserts Pope Francis, may in fact stand as a wall, an obstacle, between the Christian and the non-Christian, between a priest and his parishioners. It may represent the very contrary of evangelical love.

A young Catholic once asked Pope Francis, “What should I tell a university friend to whom I am very close but who is atheist? What should I say in order to change him, to convert him?” And Pope Francis replied: “The last thing

you should do is tell him anything. You should merely try to be faithful to the Gospel. Should he one day ask you why you are behaving the way you are, then you can reply and leave the rest up to the Holy Spirit. (...) We are witnesses of the Gospel. Proselytism is not evangelical”.³

On November 23, 2017 I attended the book-launching event of an old friend of mine, Dominique Boisvert. The book launching was for two books, one representing Dominique's spiritual autobiography *[En quoi je crois: petit essai d'autobiographie spirituelle](#)* (*What I Believe: A Short Spiritual Autobiography*)⁴ and the other titled *[La nonviolence: une arme urgente et efficace](#)* (*Non-Violence: An Urgent and Efficient Weapon*).⁵ While commenting the latter book, Dominique explained that according to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the world's most outstanding promoter of non-violence, the latter term refers not only to the absence of violence in one's struggle for justice, but also and more importantly, to a global worldview. To describe non-violence, Gandhi generally used either the Sanskrit word 'satyagraha' (*the power of truth*) or the Sanskrit word 'ahimsa' (*refusal to harm all that is living*), two expressions whose meaning goes far beyond that of 'abstention from violence'.⁶

³ Papa Francesco: "Ho pianto per i rohingya. Volevano cacciarli dal palco, ma mi sono arrabbiato", Paolo Rodari, La Repubblica, December 2, 2017. My translation from the Italian.

⁴ Published by Novalis, 2017. The word 'crois' in French means to believe. When, however, it is written with an accent on the 'i' 'crois', it means to grow. Dominique intentionally used an accent to symbolize the fact that his faith is not static, but constantly evolving and growing.

⁵ Écosociété, Montreal, 2017.

⁶ *[La nonviolence: une arme urgente et efficace](#)*, Écosociété, Montreal, 2017, p. 16.

WHAT I FIND TRULY AMAZING, when I look back at my life now that I am 75 years old, *is to realize just how much the five attitudes or worldviews I just mentioned above have in common.*

Carl Rogers argues basically that the quality of therapy depends *on the quality of the relationship that the psychotherapist manages to establish with the client.* Unconditional positive regard or caring, empathy, acceptance, congruence, and deep faith in the person, the center and very heart of therapy: such is Rogers' basic philosophy or worldview. And successful therapy, explains Rogers, will mean that the client will become more personal, closer to his emotions and deep self, will learn to love and appreciate himself, be able to perceive the uniqueness and "thisness" of persons and situations, be able to relate in depth, become more flexible, more nuanced, and more creative.

Aimé Forest adopts a similar worldview but regarding not only persons but also all beings, all that exists. He insists on the importance of adopting an attitude of *universal and very deep welcoming towards being*, which he coins "consentement à l'être". The philosopher, in order to discover the unity and meaning of being, must adopt a contemplative or meditative approach. *Only such an approach, full of benevolence, empathy, and faith, will allow one to establish a profound relationship with persons and nature.* A relationship that will reveal, through the intuition of being, both the absolute uniqueness of each person and, at the same time, the absolute or universal present in each person, in each situation. A relationship that will allow the philosopher to participate in the creativity present in the evolution of the universe.

Environmentalists blame climate change, undoubtedly the most urgent and ominous threat to all life on earth, on the

type of relationship that humans have established with nature. And not just with nature but also among themselves: slavery, colonialism, etc. Addressing climate change, they argue, calls for a new narrative, a new type of relationship. It calls for a relationship in which nature – including human nature – is not reduced to a mere input in the production process. *It calls for a new kind of rapport with the world, one in which the pursuit of having ever more is replaced by the pursuit of being ever more.* In which the pursuit of having ever more is replaced by the pursuit of *relating* ever more. It means rediscovering the profound wisdom of the indigenous way of life where nature is viewed not as a mere input, something to be used and then discarded, *but as something sacred*,⁷ something living and whose reproductive rights must be respected; where nature is viewed as a person one relates to with respect and awe and nurtures, like a mother or a sister.

The basic worldview of the Catholic theologian Gregory Baum also lies in a new type of relationship. Before the Vatican II reforms, as noted above, Catholics generally believed that outside of the Catholic Church one was living in error and could not save one's soul. "Ecumenical dialogue is not a purely humanistic engagement with new information. It is a spiritual process that changes the self-perception of the partners. *The starting point is an act of love prompting us to be silent, to listen to others, to try to*

⁷ Jonathan Watts, '[For us, the land is sacred': on the road with the defenders of the world's forests](#)', The Guardian, 2 December 2017. "In Paris, the indigenous leaders met the French ecology minister Nicolas Hulot – who moved from journalism to activism to politics and played a key role in the Paris Accord of 2015. He said the role of indigenous leaders was important, and not just at the Bonn talks. "*They are perhaps the only people who can remind us how man has alienated himself from nature. They can bring a conscience and soul that modern society can aspire to,*" he said."

understand their aspirations, and to look at reality from their perspective,” asserts Baum.⁸

And Baum quotes the Austrian-born Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, someone who was also an inspiration for Carl Rogers:

“In his book *I and Thou*, Martin Buber shows that listening with empathy to ‘the other’ makes us aware of the mystery in ‘the other’ and enables us to perceive what is deepest in him or her – a recognition that changes us, the listener, and liberates ‘the other’. In ecumenical dialogue, listening to the others and putting oneself in their shoes is a gesture of love and humility. We discover that we have been prejudiced towards them but are now ready to open ourselves to the truth. We also discover how we are seen by others and thus gain a critical insight into ourselves.”⁹

And finally, as just mentioned above, the worldview that Gandhi claims one should adopt to address social justice issues involves much more than the mere abstention from violence. Also, and more importantly it involves *a type of relationship with the world that expresses the most fundamental truth – the power of truth – that is, a universal welcoming and respect for all that is living.*

⁸ Chapter 4 – The Discovery of Ecumenical Dialogue, in [*The Oil Has Not Run Dry: The Story of My Theological Pathway*](#), McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.

⁹ Chapter 4 – The Discovery of Ecumenical Dialogue, in [*The Oil Has Not Run Dry: The Story of My Theological Pathway*](#), McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.

WHAT I ALSO FIND TRULY AMAZING *is to realize not only how much the five attitudes or worldviews I just mentioned have in common but, also and even more importantly, how much our world urgently needs to adopt these worldviews.*

Our world needs to adopt these worldviews in order to cope with ever more threatening climate change. Two recent examples, among many, of this growing threat: “Three-quarters of flying insects in nature reserves across Germany have vanished in 25 years, with serious implications for all life on Earth, scientists say”, reports The Guardian on 18 October 2017 – [Warning of 'ecological Armageddon' after dramatic plunge in insect numbers](#). And only two days later, the same paper reports, “Landmark study finds toxic air, water, soils and workplaces kill at least 9m people and cost trillions of dollars every year.” – [Global pollution kills 9m a year and threatens 'survival of human societies'](#).

Our world needs to adopt these worldviews in order to address the numerous ongoing conflicts, both on the national and international level, be they in Iraq, in Syria, in Yemen, in Venezuela, in Libya, North Korea, etc., and to address the immense and truly historical refugee crisis presently affecting the world.

Asserts Dominique Boisvert: “Those formerly known as *political* refugees (...) have been joined by those who have been called *economic* refugees, then by *security* refugees, and now by *climate* or *environmental* refugees. (...) We must also add to these tens of millions of refugees the 2.5 million people who are victims every year of human trafficking, which is of course completely illegal and considered by the international community as the new form of slavery. (...) It is precisely in the case of international migration that non-violence is the most relevant. *For the development of an attitude of openness towards and*

unconditional respect (a priori) of all that is perceived as 'the other' represents the most fundamental characteristic of nonviolence (Latter italics are mine).

“The fear of ‘the other’, spontaneous in many, can only be overcome by a face to face encounter: as long as ‘the other’ is only a category, a fantasy or a sum of prejudices, he represents an object of fear. It is only by becoming a real person, with a face and a name, a smile and a handshake that ‘the other’ suddenly appears like a human being just like me.”¹⁰

Our world needs to adopt these worldviews in order to address the interior conflict being experienced by hundreds of millions of individuals throughout the world. Individuals who are torn between alternative values. Individuals many of whom are increasingly drawn towards various forms of fundamentalism, not only Islamic fundamentalism but also Christian and other forms of fundamentalism. Individuals who are daily drawn into a way of life whose speed and demands seem to be ever increasing, a way of life that appears more and more as an irrational rat race.

Our world needs to adopt these worldviews in order to find equilibrium and wisdom in our rapidly moving technology, in a world of robots, artificial intelligence, smart phones, drones, instantaneous Internet communication. A world that according to some offers immense hope and progress, but according to others threatens to destroy that which is most human and most precious in life.

¹⁰ [*La nonviolence: une arme urgente et efficace*](#), Écosociété, Montreal, 2017, p. 77-78. In its special Christmas December 2017 issue, The Economist awards its “country of the year award” to France under Emmanuel Macron. It asserts: “The struggle between the open and closed visions of society may well be the most important political contest in the world right now. France confronted the drawbridge-raisers head on and beat them. For that, it is our country of the year.”

Testimonies from past students

As I was writing the above lines, I received an email from Alexandre Poupart, a student that I had at Dawson College back in 2001. As I had not heard from Alexandre since he graduated from Dawson in 2002 – he did attend my retirement party in 2011 – I found his email particularly moving and gratifying:

November 22, 2017

Hola Ovidio!¹¹

This afternoon, I came across the North South Studies journals that we wrote during the field trip to Nicaragua in December 2001. Through them I relived what we had experienced in Las Pozas. I reread my comments and some of them made me smile. Being so young and thinking that I knew/understood the subtleties of the complexity of the Third World (as it was then called).

I remembered your extraordinary support.

At that time, I did not master Spanish, but now I do, so I reread the story of Ena. She has now become a doctor (we are even friends on Facebook) and I know that you played a significant role in her success.

I also remember your haven of peace, in Entrelacs. It was so welcoming and the elements of nature in which you lived had a deep impact on me. The lake, cross-country skiing, the mountains, your production of maple syrup (Every year I tap a couple of maples at home so that my three children will realize that the maple syrup we eat every day does not come from the grocery store.) Besides the experience of Nicaragua, I believe that you taught me simplicity.

¹¹ Alexandre sent me his email in French. I translated it into English. The students whose testimonies appear in this section granted me permission to publish them.

I would have liked to tell you all these things at your retirement party but I guess my thinking had not yet sufficiently matured. By your example, you have been a coach and a mentor for me and I remember telling myself that one day I would like to follow in your footsteps: accompany students on field trips, help others open up to the Other, help them understand that our world is interconnected and complex... What you did is very important! You have, in your own way, prepared citizens to become involved, open and critical.

In short, even if I followed my own path, I would like to share something with you:

In 2013, I flew back to Nicaragua accompanying a group of high school students. Thanks to the ONG Mer et Monde of Montreal our trip was well organized.

Presently I'm doing community work! For almost two years now, I have been working as a development officer for the Beauport Community Development Corporation (<https://www.cdcbeauport.ca>). My work consists in trying to bring together various community agents, in order to improve, one small step at a time, the quality of life of people in need, whether through local community projects or by supporting one of our 44 member organizations that are directly involved with citizens.

I have also been recently reelected as town councilor in my hometown Lac-Delage.

I have not at all lost interest in international affairs. Last summer, for example, I went backpacking for a whole month in the Dominican Republic with my wife and our three children (2, 5, and 6 years old). We mainly stayed at our local contacts (my wife had done her master's field work there) in the mountains. It was an amazing experience

and whenever anyone in our family refers to it, their eyes are literally glowing.

Well, enough news about me! The first purpose of this long email was to get news from you... How are you doing?

Abrazo y espero que un día nuestros caminos van a juntarse de nuevo, (Hugs and hoping that one day our paths will someday cross again)

Alexandre

Alexandre's email is very similar to many others that I have received over the years from former students. For example, Naomi Shrier, when leaving Dawson College in May 2008 sent me the following heartfelt email:

May 18, 2008

Hi Ovide!

I truly could not leave Dawson without saying a few words to you, which can essentially be minimized down to two: thank you. Thank you primarily for all of your hard work, your warm heart and your dedication. Thank you for providing me with a wealth of knowledge that will never escape me. Thank you for enabling me to embark on a trip that greatly impacted my life. Thank you for being you (all cheesiness aside!).

My experience at Dawson would not have been the same had you not been a part of it. I appreciate all that you have done for our program and I truly admire your character. You have endured significant hardships and wonders, as do most in their lifetime, but you were generous enough to share them with us, which I recognize as both difficult and amazing. Having shared those experiences with us has most definitely enriched the learning experience and I feel I might never encounter another individual with such an

incredible amount of knowledge and matching experiences such as you.

You have truly inspired me, in all honesty. I aspire that in my lifetime I am able to provide at least one, never mind 30, individual(s) with the same kind of opportunities and experiences that you have given me. You have positively impacted the lives of so many students and I don't doubt that you will continue to do so.

Ovide, I could go on forever, but I'd prefer not to write as though this is the last time I'll ever see you! Hopefully we'll find a time when we're both available to catch up over a cup of coffee, my treat!

I hope my words have done my thoughts justice.

Thank you, one last time, for one of the best experiences of my life.

Have an incredible, relaxing summer and I wish you all the best for years to come.

Take care,

Naomi

And Valentina Solkin, who participated in a North South Studies field trip to Nicaragua with us in December 2006, sent me the following email on Christmas Day 2011:

Ovide!

Beautiful person that you are... Thank You!!!

Thank you for all that you've done, for all that you've shared.

Your kindest sentiments, caring intentions and loving actions for this world have inspired so many heads and

hearts. You have truly given infinite gifts to the lives of others, simply by existing as you are and embodying your beautiful beliefs.

As a teacher, a friend, and a source of lasting wisdom, you have guided so many people towards betterment and beyond.

I will never forget Nicaragua, nor all the conversations I had with you throughout my Dawson years. You always felt like home to me. A welcoming, familiar place to be, where all is accepted and embraced.

I learned to feel proud of who I was through your influence, appreciating my own personal care and dedication to this world.

You taught me the ways of compassion and patience through your generosity and thoughtfulness for others...

And for this, I will forever be grateful for all that you are.

With all my love,

Valentina

In the little book of testimonies that North South Studies students and faculty gave me for my retirement party, Michael Robertson, from the December 2007 field trip group, wrote the following testimony:

When I first met Ovide Bastien, he was in the process of booting me from the North South program at Dawson. I had snuck into the program during the summer without going through the standard interview process and found myself in a Preparing Field Trip class with 30 students who all knew each other but didn't know me. I didn't even know the trip was in three short months: these students had been preparing for a year. Fortunately, I convinced him to keep me, as I decided to stay an extra year in CEGEP to go on

the Nicaragua trip a year afterwards. During that time, I tested his patience several times, failing exams and assignments, almost always handing everything in late.

All that being said, I love the man to death, and my few words here cannot begin to describe my respect and gratitude for what he has done for me as well as many, many others. He's led an astonishingly inspirational life, from his experience and memoirs on the Chilean coup d'état, his hands-on dedication in rural Nicaragua, and the establishment of the North South program, a program that has made all the difference for so many Montreal students over the years.

Ovide has never ceased to amaze me with his writing: the passion seems to lift right off the pages, as well as his admirable teaching style. But what made all the difference for me was his ability to listen. He never takes a student's (or anyone's) words for granted, he listens and absorbs everything, a trait we can all try to emulate. This incredible ability to listen, observe and reflect is what makes him such a knowledgeable teacher, writer, activist and humanitarian.

Congratulations Ovide on a courageous, heartfelt career. I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for me. You're truly an inspirational unsung hero in my books. I wish you a grateful retirement; you deserve every second of it!

Thank you for your compassion and energy; you've made an unbelievable difference in my life. I'll try to learn and teach like you have.

THOUGH IT WOULD BE TEMPTING to take all the credit for the compliments that former students bestow on me, I believe that these have a lot to do with the worldview that I received in my youth. I believe that *I simply gave or passed on to others, and in particular to students such as Alexandre, Naomi, Valentina, and Michael what I had received when I was young.*

The love and warmth of my mom and dad, who had very little formal education, and of my four brothers and four sisters on the farm near Windsor, Ontario.¹²

The ideal that I had during the eight years I spent in the seminary studying to become a priest in the religious community of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the training I received in philosophy in Ottawa and in theology in Rome.

The influence that the study of Carl Rogers and Aimé Forest had on me during this time period, and that of my many teachers; *teachers for whom communicating their subject matter in class represented only a part of what education was all about*; teachers whose main concern was developing students' values, forming their character, teaching them to become committed to others, and in particular to the marginalized and needy; teachers who also met students individually on a regular basis in what was then called spiritual direction.

I remember when Father Jacques Croteau, the Oblate priest who was then my spiritual director, suggested that I start writing a diary. My personal thoughts, and also,

¹² It would be an exaggeration to argue that when I was young I had the ecumenical spirit of Gregory Baum. In the mid 1960s, my brother Leonard was in love with a young woman who was not Catholic. Virtually every member of our family – and that includes me! – put immense pressure on him until he finally abandoned this woman and started going out with a Catholic. Marrying someone outside of Catholicism was considered something awful and totally unacceptable in my family in those days!

occasionally, my meditations. I followed his advice and diary writing became part of my life. So much so, that I later imparted to North South Studies students the love of diary writing during their trips to Nicaragua.

Father Jacques Croteau also taught us a course titled "Pluralism". The purpose of this course in philosophy was to explore those values to which one could adhere, but that would be so broad and profound as to allow people of various religions and beliefs, including those who do not believe in God, to live and work together in mutual respect, peace, and harmony.

I still remember with fondness the many hours that Léo Boudreau and I spent with Father Sylvio Ducharme, the Oblate priest who directed our memoir on Carl Rogers. Though he was in his late sixties, Father Ducharme, who had become a fan of Carl Rogers, was still absolutely passionate about intellectual pursuit. Conversing with him was a joy, and the hours we spent in his presence exchanging on Rogers' ideas went by like minutes, like seconds.

I also remember with fondness the many hours I spent with Father Benoit Garceau, the Oblate priest who directed our memoir on Aimé Forest. Father Garceau was also extremely passionate about intellectual pursuit, and he was a remarkable intellectual and a wonderful mentor and friend.

Just as I passed on to my students what I received when I was young, Alexandre, Naomi, Valentina and Michael are now passing on to others what they received from their experience in North South Studies at Dawson College.

Part II - The conflict of subjectivity and objectivity as experienced and solved by Carl R. Rogers

What follows is the memoir that I submitted in December 1965 to my thesis director Father Sylvio Ducharme of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Ottawa. I slightly modified it to include information from another paper I wrote on Carl Rogers in January 1968 when studying theology at the University of St. Thomas in Rome.

Chapter 1: The meaning and limitations of this paper

Carl Rogers: his life, his influence

Carl Rogers was born in Chicago on January 8, 1902. Early in his teen-age years he developed, because of certain experiments in agriculture that his father allowed him to perform, what he calls “a fundamental feeling for science”.¹³ Following a period in which he explored agronomy his interest suddenly switched to that of the religious ministry, “as the result of some emotionally charged student conferences”.¹⁴

However, after becoming involved in the study of theology at the Union Theological Seminary, he eventually decided once again to change his orientation. This change was triggered by a seminar that he followed with a few of his fellow students and in which they set out “to explore ... (their) own questions and doubts” so as to find out “where

¹³ André de Peretti, *Carl Rogers ou les paradoxes de la présence*, in *Études*, janvier 1967, T. 326, p. 24.

¹⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 6.

they led”. It led me, Rogers explains, “right out of religious work”.¹⁵

“I felt that questions as to the meaning of life, and the possibility of the constructive improvement of life for individuals, would probably always interest me, but I could not work in a field where I would be required to believe in some specified religious doctrine. My beliefs had already changed tremendously and might continue to change. It seemed to me it would be a horrible thing to have to profess a set of beliefs, in order to remain in one’s profession. I wanted to find a field in which I could be sure my freedom of thought would not be limited.”¹⁶

Having thus abandoned both his faith and his religious ministry Rogers turned to the study of pedagogy and clinical psychology, finding in the latter his permanent orientation.

There followed a twelve-year period in Rochester during which Rogers devoted himself to carrying out “practical psychological service, diagnosing and planning for the delinquent and the underprivileged children” and developed, quite unconsciously, a new and distinctive approach in therapy.¹⁷ It is only when he accepted a position in 1940 at Ohio State University and saw the strong reactions that his teaching was causing in students, that he started realizing that his approach in psychotherapy was indeed different.

When, in his 1942 book *Counseling and Psychotherapy* he set out to explain and defend this approach, he was amazed

¹⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 7-8.

¹⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 8.

¹⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 13.

to see how well it was selling. By 1961 he had sold some 70,000 copies, and the sales were continuing!

Rogers carried on clinical work from 1928 to 1958 spending some 15 to 20 hours per week in private interviews with clients and endeavoring to help them overcome their distress or maladjustment.¹⁸ During all these years he equally became increasingly involved in research in the field of psychotherapy. In fact, such has been the excellence of his research that it earned him the 1956 Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association.¹⁹

Rogers' influence is considerable, and it extends to multiple fields. First and foremost, of course, in psychotherapy but also in education, pastoral ministry, industrial management, and group dynamics, a movement whose popularity in recent years has been rapidly growing. Wherever and whenever interpersonal relationships are involved, Rogers, because of his long experience with the interior dynamics of persons, has something to say. Whether problems pertain to relations within families, between races, or in the realm of national or international relations, his advice is constantly being sought.

I must confess that my encounter with Carl Rogers, though limited only to his writings, has meant a great deal to me and still does. It has forced, or better still, *allowed* me to modify my way of relating to other persons and even to myself.

This modification was provoked by a sudden awareness that I experienced. Slowly I started realizing that in my

¹⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *A Theory of Therapy, Personality, and Interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework* (Hereafter this work will be referred to as *A Theory of Therapy...*). p. 188

¹⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961, 420 pp.

concrete daily life I rarely allowed myself to be authentically comprehensive of the people I was meeting. And when I changed my attitude and started listening in depth, I experienced a certain instability mixed with a feeling of anxiety.

My instability and anxiety originated from what was happening when I consciously started listening in depth. Feeling welcomed and understood, people started opening up to me, and this with a depth that I found disconcerting and troubling.

Just as it takes considerable courage to face up to one's own deep self, it also requires considerable courage *to really encounter, in depth, other selves*.

With time this instability and anxiety slowly disappeared. And now I must admit that I am very happy to have undergone this change and would never dream of going back to what I was before.

The preceding paragraphs may seem to the reader both unnecessary and out of place in a memoir being submitted for a master's degree. I do not think so. It would have been possible to pursue the study of Carl Rogers without ever experiencing a deep understanding of the basic truths that he has grasped. Fortunately, I do not believe that this has been my case. Rogers has rendered me much more sensitive to the sacredness of each and every individual person: the three divine persons,²⁰ that of my fellow man, and my own.

Because of this I shall forever be grateful to him.

²⁰ Note added in 2017. I find it strange that I would refer, in a master's thesis in philosophy, to the three divine persons. And affirm that Rogers, who says he has abandoned the religious ministry because he could not believe in a set of religious doctrines, helped me to discover the sacredness of the three divine persons. My whole life was then centered on God, I was studying to become a priest, and my thesis director was a priest!

Purpose and limitations of this memoir

I would like this memoir to be essentially a dialogue, not a monologue. If Rogers were to read me, I would like him to feel profoundly understood; to see that I really grasp what he means. I would like him to see that I do not “know it all”. That I also feel very small before reality, before life, before truth. That I am also pursuing truth modestly and through much pain and darkness. That I appreciate him infinitely as a person, no matter what he thinks, does, or says, and also *because* of what he thinks, does, or says. That my first intention when judging him on any particular point is not that of trying to fix things forever, of solving certain issues once and for all, *but rather merely of getting always closer to the truth represented by life in all its intensity.*

The reader may wonder what a student in philosophy, and one whose knowledge in psychology is shallow and who is completely deprived of any experience in psychotherapy, could have to say about a particular psychotherapeutic orientation such as Rogers’ client centered therapy.

I would answer that in one respect such a student would have very little to say but that in another respect he would have a great deal to say.

Inasmuch as a student in philosophy considers psychotherapy qua psychotherapy (in other words, from that specific point of view), silence alone befits him. Although he studies being qua being and therefore embraces all of being in his formal object (in other words, studies all that exists), the philosopher or metaphysician does not come to know, by this mere fact, everything about everything. On the contrary, his love of wisdom should make him strive to respect all the various ways of knowing, recognizing what is proper and specific to each.

Thus the best judge of a psychotherapist as such is another psychotherapist, not a philosopher. The latter's role comes in precisely at that moment when a psychotherapeutic approach implies certain philosophical postulates, as it undeniably does. In this respect, a philosopher has much to say. Indeed, it is even his duty to pronounce himself, to judge and critically evaluate.

Which brings me to another point I would like to make.

During my last two years of studies I have become increasingly convinced, thanks to a teacher for whom I have great esteem, that one can never compare and contrast one author's thought with another author's thought without coming to grips with one's own personal thinking. In other words, it would be impossible for one to critically evaluate Carl Rogers' thought by simply comparing his ideas with those of Aristotle or St. Thomas Aquinas *without simultaneously confronting Rogers' ideas with one's own personal ideas, however crude and limited the latter may be.*

In getting to know Rogers' way of seeing life and its fundamental problems, I have often been forced to rethink my own deep convictions. And this experience has brought me face-to-face with my own ignorance and profound insecurity regarding many issues, not only in the realm of psychotherapy, but also in the field of my own present specialization, philosophy.

I have often experienced the fact that the only way of advancing in knowledge is moving from that which is more evident to that which is less so. However, pursuing such a path can often prove to be painstakingly long and difficult: one's ignorance does not disappear instantaneously.

I am grateful to Rogers for having increased, in certain respects, my *awareness* of my own ignorance. He has allowed me to embark a little more on the arduous, and

sometimes very thorny path towards truth, with all the effort, sacrifice and ups and downs that such a pursuit involves.

I would like to end this introductory note by stating the more specific purpose of this memoir. It is possible to approach Rogerian psychotherapy from many different angles; I chose to delve into a problem that has considerably puzzled, in recent years, Carl Rogers himself: the subjectivity and objectivity of human knowledge. This problem has greatly preoccupied Rogers because it springs from the core of his experience. On the one hand, the experience of a psychotherapist who is constantly meeting his clients and trying to assist them (subjective knowledge), and, on the other hand, the experience of a scientist who is constantly trying to advance the field of psychotherapy (objective knowledge).

While reading Rogers over the past three months, I became instinctively ill at ease and perplexed with some of his assertions, whose philosophical implications seemed obvious and problematic. I could sense the epistemological problem to which he was referring, but could not touch it with my finger, could not identify it.

May this memoir help to clarify this epistemological problem and address a need which Rogers himself has expressed quite explicitly:

“I see a great need for creative thinking and theorizing in regard to the methods of social science. There is a widespread feeling in our group that the logical positivism in which we were professionally reared is not necessarily the final philosophical word in an area in which the phenomenon of subjectivity plays such a vital and central role. Have we evolved the optimal method for approximating the truth in this area? Is there some view,

possibly developing out of an existential orientation, which might preserve the values of logical positivism and the scientific advances which it has helped to foster and yet find more room for the existing subjective person who is at the heart and base even of our system of science? This is a highly speculative dream of an intangible goal, but I believe that many of us have a readiness to respond to the person or the persons who can evolve a tentative answer to the riddle.”²¹

Strongly encouraged by the openness and desire manifested above by Rogers himself, I will now attempt to analyze the conflict of subjectivity and objectivity that he experienced and critically evaluate the solution he came up with.

But before undertaking this task, and in order to carry it out properly, I will first present his theory of therapy, of personality and of interpersonal relationships, and then identify the most central point that flows from his psychotherapeutic approach: his basic intuition.

²¹ Carl R. Rogers, *A Theory of Therapy*... p. 251.

Chapter 2: Rogers' psychotherapeutic experience: his basic intuition

Necessity of grasping his basic intuition

After having spent three months in an intensive study of Rogers' psychotherapeutic approach, I have become increasingly familiar with his way of thinking. My constant preoccupation consisted in trying to understand him *really*. Although this task proved to be a very difficult one that required a great amount of sensitiveness and patience, I believe that I have been successful up to a certain extent.

Understanding an author means grasping his basic intuition, which alone can convey life and meaning to the complex structure of his thought. It means seeing what he sees and the way he sees it.

I would like to quote Henri Bergson at length here, more precisely when he so powerfully describes the nature and importance of an author's basic intuition. Although Bergson was referring to the intuition of philosophers, I see no reason why the same would not apply, analogically of course, to the thinking of a psychotherapist of Carl Rogers' caliber. As I was reading and discovering Rogers, I realized that what Bergson had stated applied, and quite remarkably as a matter of fact, to Rogers.

Rogers has been marked profoundly by his daily experience as a psychotherapist, one that has guided not only his research but also his life. What he sees is not very complicated; once understood, it is basically simple. However, he spent his whole life trying to express his vision, constantly correcting it, fine-tuning it, and deepening it.

The following quote from Bergson reflects to a considerable extent what I experienced when I studied Rogers in the past three months:

“As one starts going beyond the surface and really penetrating the thinking of a philosopher, his ideas seem to undergo a transformation. First, the complication diminishes. Then the parts start fitting into one another. Finally, everything coalesces around a single point, which one feels one is approaching ever more, but that somehow remains, in the end, unattainable.

“And this point is something simple, infinitely simple, and indeed so extraordinarily simple that this philosopher has never managed to express it. And it is for this reason that he has had to spend his whole life talking. He could not formulate what he had in mind without feeling obliged to correct what he was saying, and then correct his correction: thus, moving from theory to theory, from one complication that called for another, from developments juxtaposed to other developments, rectifying himself while he thought he was merely completing himself, and at the end of the day only managing to render with a growing approximation the simplicity of his original intuition.”²²

Last August, when I first started reading Rogers' *On Becoming a Person*, I immediately started admiring him. As my study became more intensive, I realized that his thought was more complicated than I had first imagined. For one thing I noticed that he had spent numerous hours listening to tape recorded interviews and that his method of perfecting his psychotherapeutic skills was methodical and rigorously scientific. I also noticed that there had been a considerable evolution in his thinking over the years and

²² Henri Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, 12^e édition, Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1941, p. 119. Translation from French is mine.

that he had been strongly influenced by John Dewey through William H. Kilpatrick, by Otto Rank, by Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, and by logical positivism.

Having realized that he was strongly influenced by the latter currents of thought, I started to reduce his thinking to certain influences that he had undergone. In whatever I was reading, I would be quick in picking out elements that seemed to come from Buber, or Dewey, or logical positivism, etc.

But eventually I started seeing ever more unity in his ideas and what seemed like so many separate pieces began to coalesce into a simpler whole. And what seemed black and white started appearing more nuanced; what seemed perfectly correct or altogether wrong started appearing more differentiated, and more analogical.

I am convinced that this change occurred because I was able to grasp ever more his global and underlying intuition.

Thus, I do not consider this first section on Rogers' basic intuition as altogether optional in this memoir. I feel it is a 'must' if the reader is to develop an authentic understanding of Rogers. Without this preliminary and difficult task of comprehension, how could one avoid the ensuing risk of interpreting his thought from one's own point of view; of reading into the meaning of his words the meaning of one's own words; of isolating a passage from the rest of his thought, thus cutting it from its breath of life, its profound spirit, and its main source of intelligibility?

Grasping an author's basic intuition means developing an intimate and deep knowledge of the ensemble of his thought. It means becoming familiar with his main books and articles. It means spending hours meditating on the significance of what he says. It means constantly referring to one's own personal experience, trying to see the relations

the author has seen, and actually re-experiencing, up to a certain extent, what he has experienced.

All this I have tried to achieve, with more or less success. The following synthesis represents the results of this effort.

The intuition itself: person centeredness

Bergson claims that one of the best ways at one's disposal to identify an author's basic intuition is to try to find an image symbolizing, as accurately as possible, this intuition. Unfortunately, in Rogers' case, I have not been able to find such an image. Perhaps the latter does exist, and perhaps he has even stated it explicitly somewhere. However, I have not seen it, or at least, not noticed it.

Thus, I have resolved to do what seems second best: I will attempt to express Rogers' basic intuition by describing what I view as its main elements and by referring, in this description, to his most recurring themes and expressions.

If I were asked point-blank to provide Rogers' basic intuition as a psychotherapist I would immediately answer: *when one develops with one's client a profound relationship – characterized by client-centeredness, empathy, unconditional positive regard, acceptance, and congruence – the client will use this relationship to grow in maturity, to reconnect to himself, and to become his own locus of evaluation.*

When I examine the evolution that Rogers has undergone in the last 37 years this truth immediately forces itself upon me; his whole career seems to represent but the deepening of this one basic orientation.

And when I view his thought as a whole, I am again impelled to acknowledge the priority of this assertion. It is the only assertion to which everything that he says can, in a sense, be reduced, yet that, according to him, cannot itself be reduced to anything else. It represents the heart and soul

of his psychotherapeutic approach, providing color, strength, and vigor to all of its various elements.

First, I will describe in detail the qualities of the relationship that the therapist must develop with his client, then I will analyze what happens in the client as a result of this relationship, and finally I will explain the Rogerian theory of personality and interpersonal relationships underlying his therapeutic approach.

On Client, not on Theory

Rogersian client-centeredness means that when the therapist is living a relationship with his client, the only 'absolute', so to speak, in this relationship is the client himself. (I have never seen Rogers use the word absolute in this context, but I am sure that I am only being faithful to him by using it here). Absolute here means the center of attention. It also means the highest value.²³

In other psychotherapeutic orientations such as, for example, the Freudian one, therapists often concentrate their attention on the theory they hold instead of on the client himself, with the result that they end up forcing, more or less consciously of course, all the problems into the orbit of this theory. At the very beginning of his career Rogers sharply criticized such an approach.²⁴

Rogers adamantly argues that such an approach must by all means be avoided; it is the enemy number one of all personality growth and degrades the human being in his very core, in his very dignity.

²³ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implication, and Theory*, p. 35. (Hereafter referred to as *Client-Centered Therapy*)

²⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *The Clinical Treatment of the Problem Child*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939, p. 334.

We have too little confidence as therapists in the growth capacities present in each person.²⁵

Instead of being theory-centered, let us become person-centered, asserts Rogers. Instead of entering the relationship with a preconceived set of theories and categories, let us merely enter it while remaining the person we ourselves are. Too often we are afraid, as therapists, to be a mere human being with our client. So we hide behind our profession, we reduce the client to a case, a problem, an object of analysis and diagnosis.²⁶

It is not always easy to be true to ourselves, to be real, to allow ourselves to have and express genuine human feelings. In other words, to be what Rogers refers to as “being congruent”. Each time the therapist does this with his client he takes the risk of changing, and, in those cases in which the very deepening of the relationship develops into “a failure, a regression, a repudiation”, of losing himself or part of himself.²⁷

Empathic understanding

Person-centeredness means, then, for the therapist, paying attention to the client as a person with whom one enters into a relationship. But this attention itself is made up of what Rogers calls empathy, an attitude that consists in making a constantly renewed effort to become involved in the client's own personal world. Empathic understanding implies seeking to view things from the client's frame of reference; it means seeing reality the way he sees it, feeling his experiences with all the taste and flavor and color they

²⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942, p. ix.

²⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 52.

²⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 201-202.

have for him.²⁸ Being one with his field of values, his desires, his deceptions, his fears, his hopes, and his joys.

Empathy, however, must never be confused with sympathy. If the therapist sympathizes with his client he actually *identifies* himself to him. No longer does he react to the client's feelings *as if* they were his, they actually *are* his own. Only inasmuch as he manages to experience what the client feels as belonging properly to the client is he being authentically empathic.²⁹

Empathy is above and beyond both sympathy and antipathy; these last two attitudes are on the same level. Empathy is more profound, more stable, and requires deep personal security and self-mastery. If well achieved and communicated to the client, the therapist-client relationship "acquires an 'out of this world quality... a sort of trance-like feeling".³⁰

Unconditional positive regard

Another implication of Rogerian person-centeredness lies in what has been called 'an unconditional positive regard'. The therapist must have an attitude of unconditional positive regard towards his client. More exactly, he must experience, he must *be* this attitude.

Rogers often insists on the fact that this attitude is not something the therapist can adopt just before entering his interview and then abandon immediately afterwards. He emphasizes the fact that it is very difficult to achieve, and is more in the order of *being* than that of having. One cannot *pretend* that one is accepting; one either accepts or does not accept.

²⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implication, and Theory*, p. x. (Hereafter referred to as *Client-Centered Therapy*).

²⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 202.

³⁰ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 202.

Occasionally, and especially in *On Becoming a Person*, Rogers uses the word 'care' to convey what he means by unconditional positive regard. Seldom does he use the word 'love' because of the superficial connotation this word has acquired in our culture. In one article he says that it is very close to what the theologian calls 'agape'.³¹

Concretely, what does this attitude imply? It implies first and foremost, as previously mentioned, that the therapist be centered on the person of the client *in his or her absolute worth*. "It means that the therapist cares for the client in a non-possessive way. It means that he prizes the client in a total rather than in a conditional way".³² It is an attitude "devoid of the *quid pro quo* aspect of most of the experiences we call love".³³ It represents an acceptance that is very rare in ordinary interpersonal relationships and it must be stressed that it is not and can never be a mere method. Although techniques can and do help, all their value stems from the fact that they express an attitude which is *really* present in the therapist.³⁴ They must indicate the latter's real interest in the client.³⁵ What matters the most is not an intellectual but rather an *emotional* acceptance by the therapist of the client.³⁶

Adopting an unconditional positive regard towards the client means accepting all his feelings, his attitudes, his judgments, and his past and present experiences. It also means abstaining from evaluating or judging any of his actions or his judgments, and from imposing any of one's own personal goals and values on him.³⁷

³¹ Carl R. Rogers, *The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance*, Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 32, no. 4, Fall, 1962, p. 420.

³² Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 62.

³³ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 84.

³⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 19.

³⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 69.

³⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 165.

³⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 55.

Accepting is not the same as approving

This brings us to a point that is of utmost importance if one is to understand Rogers. To be totally accepting of a person does not mean to approve any of his particular manifestations. Accepting must not be identified with approving. There is a world of difference between the two and it is vitally important to understand this difference.

If someone were to tell Rogers during an interview “I think I should kill myself” he would try to be totally accepting of this judgment with its accompanying emotional significance; however, he would strictly abstain, as hard as that may be – given that the client is usually desperately searching to bring the therapist to assume the responsibility to make a judgment that he himself is afraid of making – from any form whatsoever of approval or disapproval.³⁸

This distinction – accepting a person's wish to commit suicide, but not approving or disapproving it – may appear subtle and in fact so idealistic as to become impossible to implement in the real world. If Rogers were to remain silent, would not this silence itself say a great deal? Would he not be communicating his own way of thinking, albeit in a very subtle manner?

One must answer both negatively and affirmatively here. In the course of the relationship, the therapist does approve. However, he merely approves the person in his or her absolute value, not the judgments, feelings, or deeds of this person.

Rogers likes Martin Buber's phrase “confirming the other” and it obviously reflects his own view.³⁹ To confirm the other is to accept him as a process of becoming, to “make

³⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 48.

³⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 24.

real his potentialities”. By confirming the client and yet at the same time abstaining from any external evaluation or judgment the therapist opens the door to the very heart of therapy.

Core of Therapy: Becoming Oneself

What happens in the client when the therapist succeeds in being person-centered and congruent, showing empathy, and adopting an unconditional positive regard while simultaneously abstaining from approving or disapproving the client's judgments and feelings?

The client starts moving towards growth, towards maturity. He starts using the atmosphere of freedom that naturally flows from such a relationship to explore himself.⁴⁰ He struggles to be himself and yet is “deathly afraid of being himself – striving to see his experience as it is, wanting to *be* that experience, and yet deeply fearful of the prospect”.⁴¹ Gradually learning to be present to himself and to listen to his own experiencing⁴² he thus moves away from the false images he had of himself and allows to awareness “feelings which have seemed to him so terrible, or so disorganizing, or so abnormal, or so shameful, that he has never been able to recognize their existence in himself.”⁴³

This openness to experience helps him to become more realistic, “more aware of reality as it exists outside of himself, instead of perceiving it in preconceived categories”.⁴⁴ His knowledge of reality becomes more realistic, less rigid, and more differentiating, and “he can

⁴⁰ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 109.

⁴¹ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. X.

⁴² Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 63.

⁴³ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 115.

tolerate ambiguity”⁴⁵. The openness to self he experiences means “lack of rigidity and permeability of boundaries in concepts, beliefs, perceptions, and hypotheses”⁴⁶. It means that he “gradually reduces the intensional quality of his reactions – his tendency to see experience in absolute and unconditional terms, to overgeneralize, to be dominated by concept or belief...”⁴⁷

The client learns to trust his total organism in its evaluative capacity, accepting the locus of evaluation as being within himself and thus looking less and less “to others for approval or disapproval, for standards to live by, for decisions and choices”⁴⁸. He no longer views life as something fixed and monotonous but lives it fully in each moment, and because of the flexible and adaptive quality of his perception each moment appears as quite unique and existentially new⁴⁹, and his experiencing thus takes on a character of increasing spontaneity and creativity.⁵⁰ Commonplace slogans are rejected and each particular thing or situation is appreciated in its “this-ness”.⁵¹ He once again becomes capable of communicating to others his more personal and subjective feelings and his relationships are no longer “stereotyped, but person to person”.⁵²

Interestingly enough, too, the intense focusing on the client that Rogers' approach involves does not render the client more self-conscious, but rather *less* so.⁵³

⁴⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 115.

⁴⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 353.

⁴⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 144.

⁴⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 119.

⁴⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 188.

⁵⁰ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 347 to 359.

⁵¹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 353. See also *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 144.

⁵² Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 155.

⁵³ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 129.

And not only does the client start to accept himself – acceptance could be considered as something stoical – but he “actually comes to *like* himself”, not in a bragging or self-assertive manner but in a calm and quiet one.⁵⁴

Allowing to awareness denied and distorted experiences

So far, I explained the type of relationship that a therapist adopting Rogers' approach would seek to establish with his client and then I described the various outcomes that such a relationship would generally produce in the client. However, I did not clearly distinguish between the *outcomes* of the process of therapy and the *process* of therapy as such.

A deeper understanding of Rogers calls for the analysis of what the process and nature of therapy mean for him, something that cannot be done without taking a look at his theory of personality.

Before describing this latter theory it is important to note, however, that what is most certain for Rogers is the *client-centered therapeutic experience* as such and not the theory of personality that he formulated as a psychotherapist in an attempt to explain it.⁵⁵ In other words, what is most certain is: if certain conditions exist, then certain outcomes will follow; if the therapist is person-centered, adopts an unconditional positive regard, etc., then the client will become himself, will become more open and differentiating with his experiencing, etc.

This being acknowledged, what exactly happens in the process of therapy? What is its nature? What explains the healing process that goes on in the client?

The only thing that happens basically, according to Rogers, *is that the client starts allowing to awareness experiences*

⁵⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 87.

⁵⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *A Theory of Therapy...* p. 217.

that were previously denied and/or distorted. Openly welcomed and unconditionally accepted by the therapist the client starts feeling free to experience himself, to explore himself in the innermost depth of his being; he starts expressing himself ever more and ever more openly and accurately; and he starts discovering wherein lies the root cause of his real problem, of his distress and unhappiness. And finally, he starts perceiving wherein lies the solution, he starts behaving in a more mature and enhancing way.

Rogers' general theory of therapy and personality

A few words here about the meaning that Rogers attributes to the technical terms “experience”, “denied experience”, “distorted experience”, etc.

For Rogers, ‘experience’ means whatever goes on in a person, both at the level of consciousness and unconsciousness. It excludes, though, all that goes on at a purely chemical level.⁵⁶

In the article *Experiencing: A Variable in the Process of Therapeutic Change*,⁵⁷ Rogers quotes Gendlin, whose views he considers similar to his own: “Experiencing is *felt*, rather than thought, known or verbalized”; it is “a process of feeling rather than intellectual understanding”, a process which is preconceptual but guides conceptualization. This means the process of feeling is pregnant with meaning, one that constantly tends to move from the implicit to the explicit.

“Such meaning, he says, is somewhat different from the sense in which concepts or words have meaning. (...) *One* concept or *one* word has a univocal single meaning,

⁵⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *A Theory of Therapy...* p. 195.

⁵⁷ Harvard Educational Review, Vo. 32, no. 4, Fall 1962, p. 418-419.

whereas *one* feeling often implicitly contains very many different conceptual meanings”.⁵⁸

To understand the notions of denied experience and distorted experience one must place them in the context of Rogers' general theory of therapy and of personality.

A denied experience is one that cannot be admitted to awareness, because it is not compatible with the image the person has of himself. This latter self-image represents the self that he *thinks* he has; it consists of those experiences and values he has come to recognize as his own.⁵⁹ And the self-image also represents the main and habitual source of all human behavior.⁶⁰

An experience perceived as incompatible with the self-image may be admitted to awareness but only after being distorted – a false meaning having been attributed to it – so as to be in conformity with the self-image. In the case where the experience would prove to be totally incompatible with the self-image, then it is not admitted to awareness at all, it is denied.⁶¹

*The denial and distortion of certain experiences constitutes, according to Rogers, the origin of all conflicts experienced by persons.*⁶²

⁵⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *Experiencing: A Variable in the Process of Therapeutic Change* Harvard Educational Review, Vo. 32, no. 4, Fall 1962, p. 237.

⁵⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 497-498.

⁶⁰ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 507-509

⁶¹ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 503-507

⁶² Carl R. Rogers, *The Actualizing Tendency in Relation to “Motives” and to Consciousness*, in Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1963, edited by Marshall R. Jones, University of Nebraska Press, p. 15-16. The theory presented in this work is quite different from the one exposed in *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implication and Theory*. But the change only affects the *cause* of denial or distortion, and not the fact that the latter are the cause of all personal conflict.

The child represents the ideal of a unified and well-functioning person. When hungry, he eats; when full, he stops. He starts denying and distorting certain experiences only when his significant others – those who exercise a great influence in his daily life, normally his parents – start judging, approving or disapproving certain of his actions, judgments, and feelings. Given that the deepest need in a person is to be accepted and loved, the child is thus led to deny or distort certain of his experiences, not because they are felt by him as good or bad, as self-enhancing or as unsatisfying, but merely because his parents insinuate that they are good or bad. Instead of being open to what goes on inside of himself he therefore, and quite unconsciously, centers himself on an exterior criterion. Thus, he loses confidence in his experiencing; he no longer trusts himself as his own evaluator of his own experiences. When he evaluates, he *thinks* that he is the one who is really evaluating but in fact he is simply conforming his judgment to that of his significant others, to other people's criterion.

Herein lies, according to Rogers, the origin of the chasm existing between what a person thinks he is and what he actually is. Herein also lies the origin of the person's lack of self-knowledge, of not being connected to his deep self. Herein lies, finally, the source of his unsatisfying behavior, of his constantly being at war with himself.

Up until the late 1950s Rogers held that denying and distorting experiences was a natural, though tragic development. After discussing denial and distortion he asserted: "This, as we see it, is the basis of estrangement in man (...). Yet this has not been a conscious choice, but a natural – and tragic – development in infancy".⁶³

In 1963, however, he explicitly states that he has changed his views on this point. While he continues to hold that

⁶³ Carl R. Rogers, *A Theory of Therapy*, p. 226.

denial and distortion of experience represents the fundamental cause of man's estrangement, he has come to believe that this process is not natural and necessary but rather learned "and to an especially high degree in our western culture," characterized as it is "by behaviors that are guided by rigid concepts and constructs".⁶⁴ People are rewarded for maintaining these concepts; they are constantly confirmed in them.

Having understood the cause of all human maladjustment according to Rogers, it now becomes possible to understand what happens, according to him, in the process of therapy.

Therapy is the process by which the person becomes himself, his *real* self. If he is not himself, if he is interiorly divided, it is because he denies to awareness or distorts certain of his experiences. Becoming himself means to fully explore his experiences and this he can achieve in the therapeutic relationship where the therapist's unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding provide the necessary atmosphere. It means getting rid of introjected values, those adhered to because of exterior criteria.

Only when one can become one's own locus of evaluation can one come to life! Only when values are not imposed from the exterior but freely emerge from the interior does one really grow and blossom. One must learn to interpret one's experiences oneself and to live according to one's own meanings, not those of others.⁶⁵

Small wonder then that Rogers would assert:

"Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as

⁶⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *The Actualizing Tendency in Relation to "Motives" and to Consciousness*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 23.

authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me.

“Neither the Bible nor the prophets, neither Freud nor research, neither the revelations of God nor man, can take precedence over my own direct experience.”⁶⁶

The heart of therapy, then, consists in the process whereby a person becomes his real self and achieves this by exploring his experiences and by learning to assess these on his own, and from his own locus of evaluation.

This type of learning is very personal, and very private. The therapist does not *teach* his client to know himself. Instead, he merely allows the latter to do this on his own. In fact, the therapist could not teach his client even if you were to try to, since this type of knowledge is fundamentally incommunicable. The heart of therapy “is the aspect of self-discovery”, states Rogers.⁶⁷

Man's positive orientation

At this point I am very close to identifying Rogers' basic intuition. However, there is still one basic element that must be mentioned, one that is inseparably linked to all those previously discussed.

It has been Rogers' experience that all human beings are positively oriented, an orientation that he has coined “man's actualizing tendency”. Day in and day out Rogers and his colleagues have witnessed the following paradox:

The more we permitted our “clients to choose any value, any direction in life, be it death itself or mental disease or refusal of psychotherapeutic help, then the same clients

⁶⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 23-24.

⁶⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 204.

chose a positive orientation. Faced with the choice between life or death, they chose life; between health or mental disease, health; between staying with the therapist or abandoning him, they stayed.”⁶⁸

This long experience has brought Rogers to conclude that people, deep down, are essentially good and that one must not be afraid, therefore, to let them become themselves:

“One of the most revolutionary concepts to grow out of our clinical experience is the growing recognition that the innermost core of man’s nature, the deepest layers of his personality, the base of his ‘animal nature’, is positive in nature – is basically socialized, forward moving, rational and realistic.”⁶⁹

Theory of interpersonal relationships

Rogers’ theory of interpersonal relationships is basically identical to his theory of therapy and personality, which I have just described above. The only difference is not the theory itself, but rather its *extension*, its generalization.

Rogers claims that what is valid in the therapist-client relationship is also valid for all interpersonal relationships, whether in family life,⁷⁰ in education,⁷¹ or in business, and whether such relationships take place on a one-to-one level or between groups of persons.⁷²

Significantly enough this extension coincides with his increasing interest in philosophy. One has but to read *Client-Centered Therapy*, a book written in 1951, and to compare it with *On Becoming a Person*, a book published in 1961, to see just how striking this evolution is. Part IV of

⁶⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*..., p. 48-49.

⁶⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 90-91.

⁷⁰ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 314 to 323.

⁷¹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 279 to 313.

⁷² Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 329.

On Becoming a Person is titled *A Philosophy of Persons* and Rogers mentions at the beginning of chapter 8 that he does not share the reaction of those psychologists who would regard it as an insult should someone accuse them of indulging in philosophical reflection.⁷³

Core of Rogers' psychotherapeutic intuition

Having exposed Rogers' basic theories I will now attempt to express, as briefly and concisely as possible, what I would call his basic intuition as a therapist. In other words, the overall vision that gives life and meaning to each element in his approach.

Grasping and expressing the basic intuition of an author is a challenging task and I am aware that in both of these what I will do represents but an attempt.

On the part of the therapist: client-centeredness, congruence, empathy, acceptance, unconditional positive regard. On the part of the client, general movement away from fixity and absoluteness in perceiving reality and towards a more differentiating and nuanced type of knowledge, away from fixity in behavior, greater spontaneity and creativity, living each moment as unique, learning to love oneself.

Such is, as far as I was able to discern, the main global vision underlying all of Rogers' books and articles.

Through years of concrete experience in therapist-client interviews and through considerable research based on these interviews Rogers has gradually come to see what makes the client grow towards maturity and also what hinders this growth. He has been especially struck by the *way* the client becomes himself: by exercising his freedom, by becoming his own locus of evaluation, by evaluating personally all that he is experiencing. Values that are

⁷³ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 163.

structured and absolute, and that are imposed on people, such values cannot but create psychological insecurity, tension, and maladjustment. What is truly liberating is a relationship in which the client becomes the center, the absolute and unconditional value as a person, a relationship in which the therapist manages to be a real, congruent human being, viewing the client with an unconditional trust and appreciation, abstaining from imposing on him any of his own value judgments.

And what is truly liberating in a therapist-client relationship is also truly liberating in *all* relationships, whether between husband and wife, parent and child, teacher and student, or even between nations.

This precise type of human relationship has greatly intrigued Rogers. It is very unique, very specific to each different person, and it is unpredictable. It allows people to blossom, to be creative and spontaneous, and to live every moment as unique.

Yet at the same time it is pregnant with profound elements of commonality and universality.⁷⁴

André Peretti, quoting Rogers in a conference the latter once gave in Paris, France, asserts:

“When I feel very close to the other, I find that very fulfilling. It’s as if I were listening to celestial music... Through one’s relationship with another person, one encounters that which is general, one becomes one with what is universally true... I feel the same joy that I would experience when viewing a beautiful sunset.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. X.

⁷⁵ Carl Rogers ou les paradoxes de la présence, février 1967, p. 32. Peretti quotes Rogers in French. As I do not have the original English version of his conference, I had to translate from the French. Obviously, this reference does not come from my thesis published in 1965, but rather from the paper I wrote at the University of St. Thomas in Rome in 1968.

Chapter 3: The conflict of subjectivity and objectivity

Introductory note

So far in this memoir I have made very general observations concerning Rogers' basic approach in therapy. I was trying to convey to the reader Rogers' basic intuition and my method of procedure was itself very intuitive since I was relying directly on no other basis than my own assimilation of his thought over the past three months. It was vitally important that I be immersed in his spirit, present to his thought in all of its ramifications and basic articulations.

What follows will be much more analytical and specific though I will constantly try to remain present to the spirit of Rogers' basic intuition. I will focus not on Rogers' psychotherapeutic approach as such but rather on the methodological crisis that he experienced: the conflict between subjectivity and objectivity. A crisis directly related to philosophy, my field of specialization. Great emphasis will be placed on certain citations, on the words that Rogers uses and the meaning he intends.

One more comment about the method I will follow in this analysis.

My first intention was to examine the problem of subjectivity and objectivity as experienced by Rogers by analyzing the historical evolution of his thinking, starting from his first major publications and finishing with his very last.

I was already fairly advanced in this direction when I realized that continuing with this method would be much too broad and time consuming for the purposes of my memoir. So I decided to change my approach radically.

Instead of following the historical evolution of Rogers' problem I decided to go directly to the article – *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question* (chapter 10 in *On Becoming a Person*) – in which Rogers explicitly poses the problem of subjectivity and objectivity in all of its acuteness.⁷⁶

First, I will study the problem as he explains it and, leaving aside for the time being the solution he attempts at the end of the same article, I will study the problem as it appeared, but only implicitly this time, in his book *Client-Centered Therapy*. Then I will present the solution that he comes up with first in *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*, then in *Theory of Therapy*, and finally in *A Tentative Formulation of a General Law of Interpersonal Relationships*.

Having presented the problem of subjectivity and objectivity as both experienced and solved by Rogers, I will critically evaluate the solution he came up with, identifying the points that seem problematic from an epistemological perspective and that call for further research.

The conflict in *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*

It has been impossible to determine the exact time during which this article was written. All I know is that it was written several years before it was first published in 1955 in the *American Psychologist*.⁷⁷

As mentioned earlier in this memoir, the problem of subjectivity and objectivity stems from the very heart of Rogers' career as psychotherapist. More precisely, it originates from his direct and daily experience as a therapist and from his constant scientific research in the

⁷⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 199-224.

⁷⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 200.

same field. It was more immediately provoked on the one hand by his discovery of the subjectively oriented and existentialist thinking of Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Buber, to whom he immediately felt attracted because their thinking corresponded so beautifully with what he was experiencing as a therapist, and, on the other hand, by his earlier training in logical positivism, a school of thought for which he has great respect.⁷⁸

Anyone acquainted with logical positivism, which prioritizes objectivity, and existentialism, which prioritizes subjectivity, can well imagine what conflict could erupt in an individual who happened to adhere to both of these schools of thought and to hold them both in great esteem. Small wonder that Rogers would be forced to lead what he refers to as ‘my double life of subjectivity and objectivity’.⁷⁹

Rogers wrote this article I am about to examine for the sole purpose of clarifying the interior conflict he was living. Little did he suspect at the time that it would one day be published. And noteworthy is the fact that as late as 1961 it still continued to represent a satisfying expression of his views.⁸⁰

Rogers explains the method that he followed when he decided to address and elucidate the interior war that was going on within himself between subjectivity and objectivity:

“What I did first was to let myself go as therapist, and describe, as well as I could do in a brief space, what is the essential nature of psychotherapy as I have lived it with

⁷⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 199.

⁷⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 200.

⁸⁰ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 199. On pages x and xi Rogers asserts that the introduction to *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question* was written in 1961.

many clients. (...) Then I let myself go as scientist – as tough-minded fact-finder in this psychological realm, and endeavored to picture the meaning which science can give to therapy. Following this I carried on the debate which existed in me, raising the questions which each point of view legitimately asks the other.”⁸¹

Scientist questions the experientialist

Let us first turn to the questions that the scientist within Rogers addresses to the experientialist within him, ‘experientialist’ referring here to the concrete experience that he lives with clients in his daily work as a psychotherapist.

The first question raised by the scientist plunges us straight into the heart of the problem:

“1. How can you know that this account, or any account given at a previous or later time, is true? How do you know that it has any relationship to reality? If we are to rely on this inner and subjective experience as being the truth about human relationships or about ways of altering personality, then Yogi, Christian science, dianetics, and the delusions of a psychotic individual who believes himself to be Jesus-Christ, are all true, just as true as this account. Each of them represents the truth as perceived inwardly by some individual or group of individuals. If we are to avoid this morass of multiple and contradictory truths, we must fall back on the only method we know for achieving an ever closer approximation to reality, the scientific method.”⁸²

What does the above passage imply philosophically? It undeniably implies three things.

⁸¹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 201

⁸² Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 209-210.

1. Rogers has strong doubts concerning the validity of his ordinary perception, of his direct and intuitive knowledge in attaining the real or solid reality.
2. Perception, according to him, seems to be completely interior or immanent to the perceiving person; which means that the latter is of necessity imprisoned in his subjectivity, and thus in search of an exterior criterion that would assure the objectivity or validity of his knowledge.
3. This exterior criterion necessarily calls for the scientific method, the only one Rogers knows for achieving an ever-closer approximation to reality.

In order to better understand the meaning of the passage that I am examining it would be preferable to know the content of the experiential account that it attacks. In this account⁸³ Rogers has merely described the psychotherapeutic relationship as he has so often directly and daily experienced it. He has explained very briefly all that seems to be going on during this experience both within himself and within his client. An explanation that corresponds essentially to what I have tried to express in the first part of this memoir when I attempted to explain Rogers' basic intuition.

Thus, to ask in such a radical way, "How do you know this account is true or has any relationship to reality?" represents a scathing attack and most certainly could not but create, in Rogers, a state of profound insecurity.

Let us now turn to the next question the scientist addresses to the experientialist:

"2. In the second place, this experiential approach shuts one off from improving one's therapeutic skill, or discovering

⁸³ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 201 to 205

the less satisfactory elements in the relationship. Unless one regards the present description as a perfect one, which is unlikely, or the present level of experience in the therapeutic relationship as being the most effective possible, which is equally unlikely, then there are unknown flaws, imperfections, blind spots, in the account as given. How are these to be discovered or corrected?

“The experiential approach can offer nothing but a trial and error process for achieving this, a process which is slow and which offers no real guarantee of achieving this goal. (...)

“But the scientific method, and the procedures of modern logical positivism, have much to offer here. Any experience which can be described at all can be described in operational terms. Hypotheses can be formulated and put to test, and the sheep of truth can thus be separated from the goats of error. This seems the only sure road to improvement, self correction, growth in knowledge.”⁸⁴

If one looks closely at this second question that the scientist addresses to the experientialist it becomes evident that its implications are somewhat similar yet also different from those of the first one.

Similar, in that Rogers on the one hand continues to entertain doubts on the *validity* of his intuitive or perceptual knowledge, and, on the other, finds that the only *solution* to address these doubts is to turn to the scientific method – “the procedures of modern logical positivism”.

But different also, in that the doubts that he entertains here are not as radical. In the second question the scientist is reproaching intuitive or perceptual knowledge not for allegedly having no relation whatsoever to the real world but only for offering an imperfect, imprecise, and insecure

⁸⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 210.

relation to this world: all it can offer is a trial and error process devoid of any guarantee of really advancing knowledge.

Different furthermore in that here, he not only refers to the scientific method as the only secure and guaranteed path to the real world, but he also makes explicit the meaning that science has for him: all that is describable, he says, is describable in operational terms. This latter assertion corresponds no doubt to what Rogers had previously stated when ‘letting himself go as scientist’: “Anything that exists can be measured”, he affirmed.⁸⁵

This is not all that the scientist has to say to the experientialist. He continues:

“3. Implicit in your description of the therapeutic experience seems to be the notion that there are elements in it which cannot be *predicted* – that there is some type of spontaneity or (excuse the term) free will operative here. You speak as though some of the client’s behavior – and perhaps some of the therapist’s – is not caused, is not a link in a sequence of cause and effect.

“Without desiring to become metaphysical, may I raise the question as to whether this is defeatism? Since surely if we can discover what causes *much* of behavior – you yourself speak of creating the conditions where certain behavioral results follow – then why give up at any point? Why not at least *aim* toward uncovering the causes of *all* behavior? This does not mean that the individual must regard himself as an automaton, but in our research for facts we shall not be hampered by the belief that some doors are closed to us.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 206.

⁸⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 206.

This third question of the scientist brings in an element that is new. Here the scientist's reproach, radical or moderate, no longer bears on the validity of intuitive or perceptual knowledge, but rather on the *freedom or indeterminateness* that the psychotherapeutic experience, as lived directly by both therapist and client, seems to imply. In the relationship the therapist seems to rely heavily on the person as such. The person represented by a client who has the capacity of making a new choice, of going in one direction or another, of acting freely. And also the person represented by a therapist whose behavior is also marked by freedom ("and perhaps some of the therapist's").

That both client and therapist are endowed with a free will seems to go against the very basic thrust of the scientific method that "would *aim* toward uncovering the causes of *all* behavior". Rogers, the scientist, resolves this issue by merely asserting, "we shall not be hampered by a belief that some doors are closed to us".⁸⁷

And finally, the scientist has one more remark to make:

"4. In the curing of disease, in the prevention of infant mortality, in the growing of larger crops, in the preservation of food, and the manufacture of all things that make life comfortable, from books to nylon, and the understanding of the universe, what is the foundation stone?

"It is the method of science, applied to each of these, and to many other problems.

"It is true that it has improved methods of warfare, too, serving man's destructive as well as his constructive purposes, but even here the potentiality of social usefulness is very great.

⁸⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 210-211.

“So why should we doubt this same approach in the social science field? To be sure advances here have been slow, and no law as fundamental as the law of gravity has as yet been demonstrated, but are we to give up this approach out of impatience? What possible alternative offers equal hope? If we are agreed that the social problems of the world are pressing indeed, if psychotherapy offers a window into the most crucial and significant dynamics of change and human behavior, then surely the course of action is to apply to psychotherapy the most rigorous canons of scientific method, on as broad a scale as possible, in order that we may most rapidly approach a tentative knowledge of the laws of individual behavior and of attitudinal change.”⁸⁸

This fourth question posed by the scientist merely expands on what had already been suggested by the first three questions. It allows one to see up to what extent Rogers feels that he must rely on the scientific method in order to get closer to the truth, and in particular to the basic dynamics underlying human behavior.

Science seems extremely solid and has done so much for humanity. So Rogers clings to this solidity, unable to see an alternative path: “What possible alternative offers equal hope?”

He even suggests that science represents the foundation stone for the very *understanding of the universe*.

What common thread or fundamental reproach can one discern in the four objections addressed by the scientist to the experientialist?

From what I can gather the following: subjective knowing or perception does not furnish us with a satisfying tool for

⁸⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 211.

advancing our knowledge of the laws of human behavior. It is even dangerous and absolutely insufficient. This, for the following reasons:

1. I do not know whether or not subjective knowing corresponds to the real world.
2. Assuming that it does correspond to the real world, subjective knowing remains imprecise and uncertain and thus does not allow our knowledge of the world to advance and progress.
3. Subjective knowing, by making room for freedom and indeterminateness, hampers the search for laws and facts.

And what is the unanimous answer to this fundamental reproach? The scientific method. A method that, as described here by Rogers, implies that:

1. The scientific method is the most fundamental and staunchest criterion of all truth, and the best, most reliable, and most certain way of attaining the real world.
2. All that exists can be measured, can be operationally defined.
3. Everything in the world is determined, or at least, this must be assumed for scientific knowledge to advance and progress.

Experientialist questions the scientist

Now Rogers lets his other interior self, the experientialist, take the floor, and address questions to the scientist, who in turn must listen:

“1. In the first place (...) science always has to do with the other, the object. Various logicians of science, including Stevens, the psychologist, show that it is a basic element of science that it always has to do with the observable object, the observable other. This is true, even if the scientist is experimenting on himself, for to that degree he treats

himself as the observable other. It never has anything to do with the observable me.

“Now does not this quality of science mean that it must forever be irrelevant to an experience such as therapy, which is intensely personal, highly subjective in its inwardness, and dependent entirely on the relationship of two individuals each of whom is an experiencing me? (...)”

“Science has nothing to say about the internal personal experience which ‘I’ have in therapy. It can only speak of the events which occur in ‘him’.”⁸⁹

From the latter passage it becomes evident that, according to Rogers, science as a mode of knowing cannot attain everything there is to know about psychotherapy.

But there is more to it. *What is actually beyond its scope happens to be that precisely which is most meaningful and essential in the therapeutic relationship*, that which is “intensely personal, highly subjective in its inwardness, and dependent entirely on the relationship of two individuals each of whom is an experiencing me.”

Therefore – and this is the second point implied in this passage – because science always has to do with the other, the object, must it not be forever “irrelevant to an experience such as therapy”?

The second question posed by the experientialist continues in the same line of thought:

“2. Because science has as its field the ‘other’, the ‘object’, it means that everything it touches is transformed into an object. (...) In therapy, both client and therapist become objects for dissection, but not persons with whom one enters a living relationship. If we project ourselves in the future, and suppose that we had the answers to most of the

⁸⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 211-212.

questions which psychology investigates today, what then? Then we would find ourselves increasingly impelled to treat all others, and even ourselves, as objects. The knowledge of all human relationships would be so great that we would 'know' this relationship instead of living it unreflectively. (...)

“Thus the development of science in a field like therapy is either irrelevant to the experience, or may actually make it more difficult to live the relationship as a personal, experiential event.”⁹⁰

In the first question posed by the experientialist the insistence was on the fact that scientific knowledge cannot grasp the most important element of therapy, that which is intensely personal and unique. In the second question posed by the experientialist the emphasis is on the fact that science, since it transforms everything it touches into an object, constitutes a very real threat to the person as such by cutting him off from personal unreflective living and spontaneity.

His conclusion is the same as that of the first question except that here Rogers adds that the scientific method may “make it more difficult to live the relationship as a personal, experiential event.”

The above reasoning once again implies that science might one day be able to arrive at a complete and exhaustive understanding of man's behavior.

The third reproach addressed by the experientialist to the scientist follows logically from the two previous ones:

“3. When science transforms people into objects, as mentioned above, it has another effect. The end result of science is to lead toward manipulation. If we know all

⁹⁰ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 212-213.

about how learnings take place, we will use that knowledge to manipulate persons as objects. (...)

“When all are regarded as objects, the subjective individual, the inner self, the person in the process of becoming, the unreflective consciousness of being, the whole inward side of living life, is weakened, devalued, or destroyed.”⁹¹

Scientific knowledge would then not only represent a threat for he who develops such knowledge by reducing his own interpersonal relationships to ‘inter-object’ relationships, but it would also be very dangerous in that the few who would possess scientific knowledge could manipulate the many who do not.

Noteworthy here is Rogers’ constant desire to save the subjective aspect of living. Also noteworthy is how he constantly associates subjectivity with inwardness.

The fourth and final question addressed by the experientialist to the scientist represents what amounts to an inevitable conclusion, once one has listened to the first three:

“4. Finally, (...) doesn’t all this point to the fact that ethics is a more basic consideration than science? (...)”

“Here (in psychotherapy) is the maximizing of all that is subjective, inward, personal; here a relationship is lived, not examined, and a person, not an object, emerges; a person who feels, chooses, believes, acts, not as an automaton, but as a person.

“And here too is the ultimate in science – the object of exploration of the most subjective aspects of life; the reduction to hypotheses, and eventually to theorems, of all

⁹¹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 212 to 214.

that has been regarded as most personal, most completely inward, most thoroughly a private world.

“And because these two views come so sharply into focus here, we must make a choice. (...)”

“We may be able to make a choice which will somehow conserve both values but choose we must.”⁹²

Just as one could discern a common thread or fundamental reproach in the four questions addressed by the scientist to the experientialist, one can also discern a common thread or fundamental reproach in the four questions addressed by the experientialist to the scientist.

Because science deals only with the object and because it necessarily reduces all that it touches to the status of an object, it therefore threatens to deprive man of his very personhood. It does this by transforming what is essentially a personal relationship into an impersonal relationship. And it does this by allowing the scientific elite – the few – to systematically dominate and manipulate the unscientific masses – the many.

This being acknowledged, Rogers makes it clear that one must absolutely choose: either one chooses science, which is obviously the choice of the scientist; or one chooses ethics, which is obviously the choice of the psychotherapist as experientialist.

Choosing both would be impossible, unless, someone, somehow, manages to find a way of saving both values, the scientific and ethical.

⁹² Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 214-215.

Obviously, the gist of Rogers' reproaches as an experientialist to the scientist lies in the fact that science deals with objects.

But what, exactly, does he mean by the term 'object'?

Though I do not have formal proof thereof, I would suspect that he has borrowed the meaning of this term from Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Buber, two authors for whom he admits having a great esteem. And two authors whose thinking fits beautifully well, he says, with the experience that he lives daily as a psychotherapist dealing with individual clients.

Be it as it may, one must attempt to elucidate what the term 'object' means for Rogers since it is absolutely fundamental in his argumentation.

When I carried out a textual analysis, I managed to identify the following meaning that 'object' has for Rogers:

To know something scientifically means to know it objectively; it means to know it as measurable, and as observable. A being is thus an 'object' inasmuch as it can be known scientifically, inasmuch as it can be measured and observed.

Scientific knowledge implies that anything that exists can be measured and that everything that exists is determined, caused, and completely and thoroughly intelligible. Therefore, nothing in being escapes measurement, escapes observation.

So when Rogers affirms that science deals with objects and transforms everything it touches into objects, this means that when applied to persons it necessarily deprives them of their personhood, their inwardness, their spontaneity and freedom. It means that human beings, like all other beings, can be reduced to the state of objects, are potentially completely determined and thus intelligible.

General conclusion regarding the two points of view

Such is the conflict between subjective experiencing and scientific knowledge, between subjective knowing and objective knowing as Carl Rogers lived it at a given moment in life. The reflection he so far undertook to clarify this conflict turned out to be not very helpful. Indeed, if anything, it only served to sharpen the conflict, the two points of view appearing ever more contradictory and irreconcilable.⁹³

Having followed the conflict step-by-step and having endeavored to understand its nature, I am not at all surprised by this mounting irreconcilability. It even appears unavoidable.

For one voice within Rogers seems to be saying:

“Do not put too much faith in your subjective knowing. It is completely inward and private. Science alone can lead you out of the quicksand of your subjectivity and into the bedrock of the real world. It alone leads to a knowledge that is solid, certain, precise, and progressive.”

But at the same time another voice within Rogers seems to be saying:

“Do not trust science too much for it cannot grasp that which is the most precious and fundamental in the person, its uniqueness, its freedom, its sense of responsibility, its inward becoming. It cannot grasp, in other words, the very pillar, the foundation stone of all therapy. As a matter of fact, science is not only totally blind to the heart of therapy, but if systematically applied it even threatens to do away with that which is unobservable, invisible, and unpredictable in life. That, in other words, which makes us who we are as persons, as human beings.”

⁹³ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 201.

Thus, the first point of view, that of the scientist, is characterized by a distrust of subjective knowing and a profound confidence in objective or scientific knowing, while the second view, that of the experientialist, is characterized by a distrust of objective knowing and a profound confidence in subjective knowing.

The conflict as it appears in Client-Centered Therapy: Its Practice, Implications and Theory

Before examining the solution that Rogers proposes at the end of the article that I have just analyzed, I thought it would be greatly enlightening to proceed to the study of the same problem as it appears, but only implicitly this time, in his book *Client-Centered Therapy*.

Since I have not been able to determine the exact date on which *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question* was written, it has equally been impossible for me to determine whether the book *Client-Centered Therapy* chronologically preceded or followed this article. All that I know for sure is that both were written during the same period of Rogers' life.

The problem of subjectivity and objectivity does not appear explicitly in *Client-Centered Therapy*. Thus, to provide a certain unity and consistency to my analysis, I will first examine those texts in the book that shed light on Rogers' notion of science and objectivity, and then those that shed light on his notion of subjective or perceptual knowing.

Objectivity: his notion of science

The first text that will retain my attention is taken from the preface.

Rogers first explains to the reader the purpose of his book and then, after having briefly described his experience working as a psychotherapist, he explains what meaning science has for him and his fellow psychotherapists:

“But the book also expresses, I trust, our growing conviction that though science can never make therapists, it can help therapy; that though the scientific finding is cold and abstract, it may assist us in releasing forces that are warm, personal, and complex; and that though science is slow and fumbling, it represents the best road we know to the truth, even in so delicately intricate an area as that of human relationships.”⁹⁴

What does Rogers mean here?

It is impossible to answer this question unless one links what he is saying here to the ensemble of his thought. When Rogers says that science is the best road to truth does he thereby mean that it alone can lead man to solid reality, to the real world? Or does he merely mean, instead, that it is the best way that man has for checking all of his perceptual or subjective knowledge of reality, rendering it ever more certain, ever more precise, and ever more solid?

I find it impossible to attempt an answer for the time being.

A few pages later (no longer the preface) Rogers discusses the origin and development of client-centered therapy. After pointing out the cultural factors accounting for its birth, he immediately adds that there are other factors involved:

“Most deeply of all, it is built upon close, intimate, and specific observations of man’s behavior in a relationship, observations which it is believed transcend to some degree the limitations or influences of a given culture. Likewise, in its research attempts to discover the significant laws which operate in a therapeutic relationship it is endeavoring to cut through to invariances, to behavioral sequences which are

⁹⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. xi.

true not only for a day or a culture, but which describe the way in which man's nature operates.”⁹⁵

It is clear from the above passage that the truth for which Rogers and his colleagues are searching as scientists *transcends both time and culture*. They are trying to identify invariances that describe the way in which man's nature operates and are going about this task by making close and intimate observations of man's behavior in a relationship.

It is very difficult to ascertain the exact scope of these judgments. Undoubtedly Rogers manifests, here, his faith in the transcendental character of truth. But is he suggesting that scientific knowledge alone would be able to grasp the transcendental character of truth? Is he suggesting that it alone would be able to attain basic truths about human relationships, truths that transcend both time and culture?

For the time being, I will not attempt to answer this question.

On the following page Rogers makes another assertion that can further our present inquiry. There has been a tendency to consider non-directive therapy as a technique, a method, “a rather rigid system”. This is absolutely false, he claims. Client-centered therapy, asserts Rogers, is precisely characterized by change rather than rigidity:

“In this flux of changing thinking there are some central hypotheses which give unity to the search for knowledge. Perhaps one of the reasons for the high stimulus-value which client-centered therapy seems to have had is the fact that these hypotheses are testable, are capable of proof or disproof, and hence offer a hope of progress, rather than the stagnation of dogma. There seems more than the likelihood that psychotherapy is, by the efforts of various workers,

⁹⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 5.

being brought out of the realm of the mystical, the intuitive, the personal, the indefinable, into the full light of objective scrutiny.”⁹⁶

Before attempting an interpretation of this last text I will examine one more that will, I am sure, shed considerable light on the whole question.

Before turning to the text as such, a preliminary word about its context, vital for its understanding. Rogers has just remarked that the operational philosophy of the student who is receiving training in counseling determines, to a considerable extent, the time it will take him to become skillful in his work. If he is already inclined, before training, to respect persons, to leave them choose their own goals and values, then the client-centered techniques will merely reinforce this attitude, and thus learning will be easier. If on the contrary his operational philosophy is such that he tends to use persons, dominating them and treating them as an object to be diagnosed, dissected and manipulated, then he will find the practice of the client-centered techniques very difficult.

After making this remark Rogers continues:

“The question may well arise, in view of the preceding section, as to whether client-centered therapy is then simply a cult, or a speculative philosophy, in which a certain type of faith or belief achieves certain results, and where lack of such faith prevents these results from occurring. Is this, in other words, simply an illusion which produces further illusions?

“Such a question deserves careful consideration. That observations to date would seem to point to an answer in the negative is perhaps most strikingly indicated in the experience of various counselors whose initial philosophic

⁹⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 20.

orientation has been rather distant from that described as favorable to an optimum use of the client-centered techniques. (...)

“The attitudinal orientation, the philosophy of human relationships which seem to be a necessary basis for client-centered counseling, is not something which must be taken ‘on faith’, or achieved all at once. It is a point of view which may be adopted partially, and put to the test. It is actually a hypothesis in human relationships and will always remain so. (...)

“It would seem justifiable to say that the faith or belief in the capacity of the individual to deal with his psychological situation and with himself is of the same order as any scientific hypothesis. It is a positive basis for action, but it is open to proof or disproof.”⁹⁷

What is the meaning of the above passages? What do they reveal about Rogers’ conception of science?

The texts that I have analyzed so far allow me, I believe, to answer these questions.

To those of you, Rogers explains, who suspect that the underlying philosophy of client-centered therapy is just a matter of cult or of speculative philosophy in which a certain type of faith or belief achieves certain results, and where lack of such faith prevents these results; to those of you who suspect, in other words, that this whole affair of client-centered therapy is simply a matter of illusions producing further illusions, to you I address this remark: experience has shown that many therapists who were, at the outset, far removed from such an approach, have slowly adopted it as their own *because when they tried it, it actually worked!*

⁹⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 22-23.

So you see, what I am proposing here does not rest on mere blind faith. Nor is it merely an illusion. When tested, client-centered therapy works, it brings about positive outcomes. It does not represent a dogma but rather a hypothesis in human relationships and will always remain so.

It seems undeniable to me that Rogers here is swimming in considerable ambiguity. Though my thinking is not yet definitive on this point, I am strongly inclined to see this ambiguity in the following manner.

If Rogers clings so earnestly to the *hypothetical* aspect of his faith in human beings, it is because a voice within him – that voice originating from his training in logical positivism – proclaims that “unless a truth is scientific, unless it is testable and *until* it is tested and proved, it does not have any reality, it is but a mere illusion, a cult, or a dogma”.

Would this not represent the profound meaning of the text above that I have purposely left without an interpretation, the text in which Rogers clearly affirms that it is more than likely that psychotherapy will be gradually brought out of the realm of the mystical, the intuitive, the personal, the indefinable, and into the full light of objective scrutiny? In other words, that what is presently unobservable, unpredictable, and indefinable in human relationships will one day become observable, predictable, and definable?

I must admit that in one respect I can see what Rogers means here. And in a sense, what he is asserting is justifiable. If the text only means that client-centered psychotherapy is not some mystical dream but has actually been found to work when tested, then I agree.

However, in another respect, I do not agree with Rogers' statement because it lends itself to another interpretation. It reveals a spirit of scientism. It suggests that knowledge, unless it is subjected to the scientific method, can never attain its object, can never be objective, and is possibly

nothing but a mere illusion, or a mere cult. It suggests that the knowledge and faith – here I am not referring to religious faith – that people experience in their routine daily lives is devoid of validity unless it is subjected to the criteria of science. It suggests that without the testing originating from the scientific method, faith and whatever impact it would have on others in human relationships could be but a mere illusion. It suggests that faith in other human beings may produce positive results, may work just fine, but that this will always remain a mere hypothesis, subject to proof or disproof. Nothing more. And that if it does not remain a hypothesis, then it smacks of an illusion, a cult, or a dogma.

Does one not encounter here the very same fundamental problem that Rogers the scientist was addressing to Rogers the experientialist in *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*? More specifically, is this not the same ideological framework that led the scientist to radically call into question the account of the experientialist: “How can you know that this account, or any account given at a previous or later time, is true? How do you know that it has any relationship to reality?”

Subjectivity: his notion of perception

In the last chapter of *Client-Centered Therapy* Rogers explains the theory of personality and behavior that his long experience in psychotherapy has brought him to formulate. He does so in nineteen short propositions, each followed by a word of explanation.

I will now examine propositions one and two, which deal explicitly with subjective knowing. But before doing so, an important remark.

“Some of these propositions, must be regarded as assumptions, while the majority may be regarded as

hypotheses subject to proof or disproof”, Rogers asserts.⁹⁸ In other words, some propositions enunciate truths which are self-evident, which must thus be simply assumed or taken for granted, while others are mere hypotheses subject to proof or disproof.

Not surprisingly propositions one and two, which deal with subjective knowing, fall into the category of assumption. Rogers does not say so in so many words but implies it when he asserts that the propositions that he is trying to explain can be “illustrated from the daily experience of everyone”.

Bearing this in mind, I will now examine each one of these two propositions:

Proposition 1: *Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the center.*⁹⁹

After stating the proposition Rogers comments it. His commentary repeats and completes what we have already discussed above.

The private world of the individual may be called the “phenomenal field” or “the experiential field”. It includes all that goes on (and is experienced) in the organism whether or not this be consciously perceived. Only a portion of these experiences are *consciously* experienced, some being prevented to awareness and others only being ‘available’¹⁰⁰ to awareness. This world of experience is private, it is only knowable, “in any genuine or complete sense”, to the person himself.

⁹⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 482.

⁹⁹ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 483.

¹⁰⁰ Rogers points out that an experience is ‘available’ to awareness when it is not actually perceived (or in the field of consciousness) but when nothing prevents it from being perceived. Obviously, an experience that would stand in stark contrast to one’s self-image would not be ‘available’ to awareness.

The point that must be grasped here in relation to our general inquiry is the following: According to Rogers, each person is alone in his or her world of meanings and values; he or she lives in a private, a unique world. Consequently, he or she alone can know this world in any complete sense; other persons have no necessary link or communion to this world.

Proposition 2: *The organism reacts to the field as it is experienced and perceived; this perceptual field is, for the individual, reality.*

This is a simple proposition, one of which we are all aware in our own experience. Yet it is a point that is often overlooked. I do not react to some absolute reality, but rather to my *perception* of this reality. It is this perception that, for me, is reality, asserts Rogers.¹⁰¹ And he continues:

“To understand this concept that reality is, for an individual, his perceptions, we may find it helpful to borrow a phrase from the semanticists. They have pointed out that words and symbols bear to the world of reality the same relationship as a map to the territory that it represents. This relationship also applies to perception and reality. We live by a perceptual ‘map’ *that is never reality itself*. (Italics are mine) (...)

“To the present writer it seems unnecessary to posit or to try to explain any concept of ‘true’ reality. For purposes of understanding psychological phenomena, reality is, for the individual, his perceptions. Unless we wish to involve ourselves in philosophical questions, we do not need to attempt to solve the question as to what *really* constitutes reality. For psychological purposes, reality is basically the private world of individual perceptions, though for social purposes reality consists of those perceptions which have a

¹⁰¹ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 484.

high degree of commonality among various individuals. Thus this desk is 'real' because most people in our culture would have a perception which is very similar to my own.

"While it is not necessary for our purposes to define an absolute concept of reality, it should be noted that we are continually checking our perceptions against one another, or adding them to one another, so that they become more reliable guides to 'reality'. For example, I see some salt in a dish. That, for me at that instant, is reality. If I taste and it tastes salty, my perception is further confirmed. But if it tastes sweet, my whole interpretation of the situation is changed, and both in seeing and tasting I perceive the material as sugar. Thus, each perception is essentially a hypothesis – a hypothesis related to the individual's need – and many of these perceptions are tested and re-tested by experience. (...)

"Thus, the world comes to be composed of a series of tested hypotheses which provide much security. Yet mingled with these perceptions, which have been confirmed by a variety of experiences, are perceptions that remain completely unchecked. These untested perceptions are also part of our personal reality, and may have as much authority as those which have been checked"¹⁰²

If I have quoted Rogers at length here, it is because I feel this passage brings us to the heart of the problem of subjective knowing as he lives it. As with many others, it is not easy to interpret.

It seems to me that basically Rogers is merely attacking here what I would call 'naïve' realism, the realism according to which man's knowledge of reality would be of an absolute and instantaneous character, somewhat like a camera taking a picture. No, he asserts, the question is not

¹⁰² Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, p. 485-486.

that simple, man does not react to some absolute reality but to what he perceives of reality. For each individual, his own perception of reality *is* reality. We do not live according to reality but according to ‘a perceptual map which is never reality itself’.

The question immediately arises, then, whether each person is not thus imprisoned in his own private world of perceptions, doomed never to know the real world. In such a context, the passage previously analyzed that had thrown a radical doubt on the validity of subjective knowing, no longer scandalizes us. But at this moment Rogers merely avoids the question by explaining that it has no relevance to psychological phenomena as such, and that it properly belongs to the philosopher.

However, he does not leave the matter in complete darkness. Although we do not know up to what extent our perceptions attain the real world, we do know that we are continually checking our perceptions one against another, or adding them one to another.

The example that Rogers uses as an illustration merits close attention. To see salt in a dish is to hypothesize that the perceived reality is salt. To taste this reality is to confirm or contradict the former hypothesis. If it tastes sweet, then I say it is not salt but sugar; salty, then I am confirmed in my initial hypothesis. This brings him to conclude that to perceive is, essentially, to hypothesize: “Thus each perception is essentially a hypothesis”.

It now becomes possible to understand what is meant by the private world that the individual lives in, as described by Rogers in Proposition 1. This world is essentially composed of hypotheses or perceptions, some of which are checked but many of which are unchecked. And the latter may have, mentions Rogers, as much authority for the individual as the ones that have been checked.

Such a conception of subjective knowing cannot but lead to certain fundamental problems. When I analyzed the article *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question* I concluded that perception, according to Rogers, refers to interiority, immanence. And the commentary that he makes after stating Proposition 1 only confirms this conclusion and helps explain why Rogers, the scientist, could be led to the radical calling into question of the 'experientialist account' of Rogers, the psychotherapist.

Perhaps Rogers, in defining perceiving as hypothesizing, did not have the slightest intention of philosophizing but as a matter of fact he was. And his definition of what it means to know or perceive leaves to be desired and is not logical.

To say that one of the outstanding characteristics of human knowledge is the act of hypothesizing is one thing. But to *reduce* knowing to this act, *to say that to know is to hypothesize is quite another!*

Strictly speaking one hypothesis can never, of and by itself, confirm or infirm another hypothesis, not any more than it can confirm or infirm itself. This is so because *creating* a hypothesis is not the same thing as *verifying* it. I can hypothesize that something is salt *but when I actually taste it as salty I am no longer just hypothesizing!* I am perceiving, I am knowing.

If to perceive or to know is to hypothesize, that would imply that the act of *checking* the validity of a hypothesis is devoid of perception or knowledge.

One can forever hypothesize without ever attaining, in so doing, reality. A hypothesis is confirmed or infirmed by an act of knowledge which attains reality.

Chapter IV: The solution of the conflict

Solution proposed in *Persons or Science?* A Philosophical Question

Having made an attempt to get as exact a picture as possible of the conflict experienced by Rogers' between subjectivity and objectivity, I will now examine the solution that he himself comes up with at the end of his article *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*.

The solution was only formulated about one year after Rogers had attempted to express the conflict on paper, and it resulted from Rogers' discussion of "the issues with students, colleagues and friends".¹⁰³

"Gradually I have come to believe that the most basic error in the original formulation was in the description of science. (...)

"The major shortcoming was, I believe, in viewing science as something 'out there', something spelled with a capital S, a 'body of knowledge' existing somewhere in space and time. In common with many psychologists, I thought of science as a systematized and organized collection of tentatively verified facts, and saw the methodology of science as the socially approved means of accumulating this body of knowledge, and continuing its verification. It has seemed somewhat like a reservoir in which all and sundry may dip their buckets to obtain water – with a guarantee of 99% purity. When viewed in this external and impersonal fashion, it seems not unreasonable to see Science not only as discovering knowledge in a lofty fashion, but as involving depersonalization, a tendency to

¹⁰³ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 215.

manipulate, a denial of the basic freedom of choice I have met experientially in therapy.”¹⁰⁴

The basic error, then, in his previous way of presenting the problem, originated from his notion of science. Science had initially seemed to Rogers as something existing outside of persons, outside of their subjective experiencing. It had appeared as the first and primary criterion of all truth – a ‘reservoir’ into which all knowledge could be poured in order to come out 99% pure of error and illusion.

But Rogers has discovered his error. Science exists, always and only, *in* people:

“Each scientific project has its creative inception, its process, and its tentative conclusion, in a person or persons. Knowledge – even scientific knowledge – is that which is subjectively acceptable. Scientific knowledge can be communicated only to those who are subjectively ready to receive its communication. The utilization of science also occurs only through people who are in pursuit of values which have meaning for them. These statements summarize very briefly something of the change in emphasis which I would like to make in my description of science.”¹⁰⁵

This passage gives us, in a nutshell, Rogers’ solution to his problem of subjectivity and objectivity.

What was the heart of the problem? His trust in science and his distrust of subjective knowledge on the one hand, and, at the same time, his distrust in science and his trust in subjective knowledge on the other hand.

And how does he resolve this dilemma?

Science is no longer conceived as an external and impersonal ‘reservoir’ screening all knowledge and

¹⁰⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 215-216.

¹⁰⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 216.

rendering it 99% pure of error. Instead, it is acknowledged that all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, lies inside concrete persons and never produces absolute truths, an impersonal ‘body of knowledge’.

“There are only tentative beliefs, existing subjectively, in a number of different persons. If these beliefs are not tentative, then what exists is dogma, not science”, asserts Rogers.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, science is no longer viewed as depersonalizing – and thus does not represent a risk for man’s freedom – because all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, “is that which is subjectively acceptable”.

Subjective knowledge is also no longer perceived as being fundamentally devoid of any solid footing in reality and therefore of warranting a radical calling into question, one so radical that the scientist could accuse the experientialist of living in a world of mere illusions. The scientist, asserts Rogers, may even “in the last analysis (...) place more trust in his total organismic reactions (the latter reactions refer to what Rogers means by perceptual or subjective knowing) than in the methods of science”.¹⁰⁷ Therefore it would seem that Rogers admits the priority of perceptual knowledge over scientific knowledge, at least in a certain sense.

I must admit that this solution seems to be, in my opinion, a very valid one. Rogers really has managed to ‘soften up’ his conception of science in order to find more room for the existential person in all of his or her spontaneity, unreflective living, and freedom. He has done this by putting more emphasis on this latter aspect of man’s knowledge, *on acknowledging the priority and/or greater*

¹⁰⁶Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 219.

¹⁰⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 219.

trustworthiness of subjective or experiential knowing over scientific knowledge.

This being said, I cannot avoid sensing that the solution he has come up with leaves to be desired in some respects and does not really solve the problem of subjectivity and objectivity as it was raised in the first part of *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*.

Further textual analysis will help the reader see what I mean.

Solution proposed in *A Theory of Therapy*

The article *A Theory of Therapy* was published in 1959 and was written at the time of publication. At least eight years had thus gone by since Rogers' first attempt, in *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*, to find a solution to the problem of subjectivity and objectivity.

Only one text in *A Theory of Therapy* will retain my attention. Rogers, after providing the reader with a short autobiography and just before presenting his theory of therapy, lists a few of his fundamental personal convictions.

I will take a look at the eighth personal conviction that he presents:

“There is one other attitude which I hold, which I believe has relevance for the proper evaluation of any theory I might present. It is my belief in the fundamental predominance of the subjective. Man lives essentially in his own personal and subjective world, and even his most objective functioning, in science, mathematics, and the like, is the result of subjective purpose and subjective choice. In relation to research and theory, for example, it is my subjective perception that the machinery of science as we know it – operational definitions, experimental method, mathematical proof – is the best way of avoiding self-

deception. But I cannot escape the fact that had I lived two centuries ago, or if I were to live two centuries in the future, some other pathway to truth might seem equally or more valid. *To put it more briefly, it appears to me that though there may be such a thing as objective truth, I can never know it; all I can know is that some statements appear to me subjectively to have the qualifications of objective truth. Thus there is no such thing as Scientific knowledge; there are only individual perceptions of what appears to each person to be such knowledge.*

“Since this is a large and philosophical issue, not too closely related to what follows, I shall not endeavor to state it more fully here but refer any who are interested to an article in which I have tried to expound this view somewhat more fully.”¹⁰⁸ (*Italics are mine*)

The article to which Rogers refers any reader interested in exploring the issue in greater depth is none other than the one I just finished analyzing above, *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*. And as Rogers explicitly states that in this article he has tried “to expound this view somewhat more fully”, one must conclude that this solution still reflects his views and presumably gives one the very key to the solution at which he arrived regarding the conflict between subjectivity and objectivity.

This being acknowledged, and given that Rogers in *A Theory of Therapy* presents his eighth personal conviction in order to shed light on the fundamental solution he arrived at in *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*, one must conclude that *Rogers appears to save subjectivity by simply doing away with objectivity.*

Today, in our present world, the scientific method appears to both my colleagues and me as the best road to truth,

¹⁰⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *A Theory of Therapy...*, p. 191-192. The article that he refers to at the end of this citation is *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*.

asserts Rogers. But had I lived at another time in history, past or future, then another pathway to truth might have seemed equally or more valid. In other words, *though there may be such a thing as objective truth, I can never know it. I can only say that something seems to me as objective.* I can only say that *I perceive* something as being objectively true. “There is no such thing as Scientific knowledge”, asserts Rogers. “There are only individual perceptions of what appears to each person to be such knowledge”.

Is Rogers not basically asserting here that all subjective knowing is purely immanent? Is he not suggesting that man is fundamentally imprisoned in his perception of the world, in his own private and unique world?

If scientific or objective knowledge, perceived as the source of all precision, rigor, and progress in knowledge, no longer appears dangerous to the heart of the psychotherapeutic relationship and to the person as such – spontaneity, unpredictability, uniqueness, sense of responsibility, and freedom – *it is because man can never know it*, man can never really attain it! It appears to exist and may be possible; but all that I can know is that some statements appear to me to have the qualifications of objective. No more. I cannot say that something is objectively true; I can only say that *I perceive* something as objectively true.

In my analysis of Rogers' interior conflict between subjectivity and objectivity, I noted that on the one hand the scientific method implied the complete determinateness and intelligibility of the universe and of man himself, and that, on the other hand, the heart of client-centered therapy rested on a therapist-client relationship that is unique and characterized by spontaneity, freedom, and unpredictability. From this opposition there resulted an open war between Rogers the scientist and Rogers the experientialist.

Now Rogers solves the problem not by ceasing to view the universe and even persons as completely determined and intelligible but only by asserting the predominance of the subjective over the objective. Or, in other words, by affirming that all knowledge, even scientific knowledge, is subjective *in the sense that it is always hypothetical and tentative*. Man never knows reality in its very determinateness so objective knowledge stops representing a threat to freedom.

Undoubtedly, the text just cited – Rogers' eighth fundamental personal conviction – and especially those lines I have italicized, is very radical and of great consequence. Strangely enough these very lines, such as they appear in a French translation that was published three years later, are not properly translated. The French text reads as follows:

“En résumé, quoique je me rende compte de la possibilité de l'existence d'une vérité objective, je me rends compte en même temps de ce que je ne pourrai jamais la connaître pleinement”.¹⁰⁹

Now there is a world of difference between what Rogers asserts in the original English version and what is asserted in the French translation. The English version states: “though there may be such a thing as objective truth, I can never know it”. The French version states: “though there may be such a thing as objective truth, I at the same time realize that I will never be able to know it fully”.

The English version bluntly states that one can never know objective truth while the French version only states that one can never know it fully.

¹⁰⁹ Carl R. Rogers et Marian G. Kinget, *Psychothérapie et relations humaines*, vol. I, p. 157-158.

Whether or not Kinget purposely made this change in her translation I do not know. But considering the fact that Rogers himself regarded this conviction as fundamental – I believe, he says, that it “has relevance for the proper evaluation of any theory I might present” –, such a negligence leaves one wondering.

Solution proposed in A Tentative Formulation of a General Law of Interpersonal Relationships (Chapter 18 in *On Becoming a Person*)

This article was written around the same time period as the citation to which I have just referred in *A Theory of Therapy*. It represents Rogers' effort “to formulate, in one hypothesis, the elements which make any relationship either growth-facilitating or the reverse”.¹¹⁰

Again, only one citation will retain my attention. After attempting to define the concept of “congruence”, Rogers goes on to expose one of the most important corollaries of congruence, something “which is not at all obvious”:

“If an individual is at this moment entirely congruent, his actual physiological experience being accurately represented in his awareness, and his communication being accurately congruent with his awareness, then his communication could never contain an expression of an external fact. If he was congruent, he could not say, ‘That rock is hard’; ‘He is stupid’; ‘You are bad’; ‘She is intelligent’. The reason for this is that we never *experience* such ‘facts’. Accurate awareness of *experience* would always be expressed as feelings, perceptions, meanings from an internal frame of reference. I never know that he is stupid or you are bad. I can only perceive that you seem this way to me. Likewise, strictly speaking, I do not *know* that the rock is hard, even though I may be very sure that I

¹¹⁰ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 338.

experience it as hard if I fall down on it (and even then I can permit the physicist to perceive it as a very permeable mass of high-speed atoms and molecules). If the person is thoroughly congruent then it is clear that all of his communication would necessarily be put in a context of personal perception. This has very important implications".¹¹¹

As the reader may have already observed, the notion of 'congruence' is very closely associated to what Rogers refers to as subjective experiencing, organismic sensing, subjective knowing, sensing, or feeling. In ordinary language being congruent means being real, being close to one's self, to what is going on in one's interior world. Congruence is undoubtedly one of the most fundamental elements in client-centered therapy, as Rogers understands it, even though in my discussion of Rogers' basic intuition in the first part of this memoir I only referred to it very briefly.

I do not believe that the above citation requires a long interpretation. An exact understanding of its deep meaning would certainly call for an extensive elaboration of Rogers' technical vocabulary, but such a task would be beyond the scope of this paper whose object is not Rogers' client-centered therapy as such, but rather the philosophical implications of the conflict that he has lived between subjectivity and objectivity.

Viewed in the latter light, the meaning of the citation is quite clear. To perceive is, fundamentally, to see things not as they are *but merely as they appear to me*, according to Rogers.

Acknowledging this must not be taken to mean that the more one would be congruent, the more one would

¹¹¹ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 338.

perceive things subjectively and personally; and the more one would perceive things subjectively and personally the less one would see reality as it is.

Such is definitely not what Rogers means here. In *Client-Centered Therapy* Rogers, after avoiding discussing what would be “true” reality, points out very clearly that one acquires an ever-better guide to “reality” by constantly checking one’s perceptions against one another, and by constantly obtaining ever-new perceptions.

However, it remains true that considerable ambiguity remains. Beyond the shadow of a doubt there is a strong tendency in Rogers to view perception and knowing as having to do with the subjective, the interior, the inward, and the private, and not with the exterior, the outward, the public, and the objective. And by defining the act of knowing, as mentioned above, as a mere act of hypothesizing, Rogers fails to understand that the act of verifying the validity of a hypothesis, or in other words the act of “constantly checking one’s perceptions against one another”, implies knowledge, implies contact with the real world.

Rogers does not say guide to reality, but only guide to ‘reality’!

Chapter V: General conclusion

In concluding this memoir, I will first outline the main ideas that I have presented and then point out certain problems that would seem to call for further study and research.

In the first part I attempted to identify, as much as possible, Rogers' basic intuition as a psychotherapist. This was deemed necessary in order to carry out the main objective of this research: understanding, through a systematic textual analysis, the conflict between subjective and objective knowledge, as experienced and solved by Rogers, and critically evaluating his solution from a philosophical perspective.

Rogers' basic intuition

As previously mentioned, Carl Rogers argues basically that the quality of therapy depends *on the quality of the relationship that the psychotherapist manages to establish with the client*. Unconditional positive regard or caring, empathy, acceptance, congruence, and deep faith in the client, the center and very heart of therapy: such is Rogers' basic intuition or worldview. And successful therapy, explains Rogers, will mean that the client will become more personal, closer to his emotions and deep self, will learn to love and appreciate himself, be able to perceive the uniqueness and "thisness" of persons and situations, be able to relate in depth, become more flexible, more nuanced, and more creative.

Rogers explains the therapeutic process experienced by the client on the basis of his theory of personality and interpersonal relationships. An individual becomes dysfunctional and at war with himself when, instead of

evaluating his experiences from his own locus of evaluation, he evaluates them from the exterior criterion represented by his significant others – usually his parents. His real self is thus hidden or buried under the self resulting from such exterior-imposed criteria, a self made up partly of flatly denied experiences, partly of experiences allowed to awareness but first distorted. Successful therapy allows the individual to discard the exterior criteria, to welcome the denied experiences, and to reinterpret the distorted ones on the basis of his own locus of evaluation. He thus reconnects in depth to his real self, blossoms, and experiences freedom.

Conflict of subjectivity and objectivity

I then undertook a long textual analysis of the conflict of subjectivity and objectivity as lived and solved by Rogers. A close examination of the first part of *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question* brought me directly to the heart of the problem: a simultaneous faith and distrust in both subjective knowing and objective knowing, but from different aspects. The subsequent analysis of the problem as it appeared in *Client-Centered Therapy* allowed me to deepen my understanding of the conflict and to situate it more concretely.

I then examined the solution that Rogers proposed in *Persons or Science? A Philosophical Question*, showing that he had solved the problem by arguing that all knowledge, including that which is scientific, lies in persons. And by softening his notion of science, on the one hand, and strengthening his notion of subjective knowing or organismic experiencing on the other.

However, the study of two more citations revealed that Rogers had solved his conflict by making subjective knowledge overthrow, to some extent, objective knowledge.

In order to shed light on the unity existing between Rogers' basic intuition and the solution he ended up adopting to address his conflict of subjectivity vs. objectivity, I would turn the whole affair into a drama.

The scientist in Rogers had a fight with the person-centered psychotherapist in Rogers. Both were feared and both were esteemed, but within the same one person. During the fight, the person-centered psychotherapist took the lead and finally won. However, the scientist was only bruised, not knocked out, so he kept on living in him, but now, as the servant of his conqueror.

Critical evaluation of Rogers's solution

I am convinced that Rogers has been a very great benefactor of mankind and still is more than ever. On more than one occasion I have come to the conclusion that his most profound message is that of love. He tells us to love and especially HOW to love: by accepting our fellow man, each one of them, as persons of absolute worth; by trying to welcome them, to understand them in depth, to get into their world of meaning, of feelings, and of values. And thus, setting them free: free to be their real selves, free to drop their daily masks and façades, free to choose their own values, free to let other persons become free.

But I am also convinced of something else. I think it is extremely important to accept both aspects of human knowledge, the subjective and the objective. I believe in the existence of objective truth and I believe that man can attain it. I believe that man is not imprisoned in his inwardness, in his own perceptions.¹¹²

¹¹² Note added in 2018: this paragraph seems to rely primarily on mere faith, and not, as should be the case in philosophy, on reason. For an authentic philosophical analysis of subjectivity and objectivity, of immanence and transcendence, see my book *Life of the Mind According to Aimé Forest*.

By prioritizing the subjective aspect of human knowing, Rogers ends up calling into question its objective aspect and indeed the very possibility of truths of transcendental value. Truths that are valid for you, for me, and for everyone.

Small wonder that Rogers does not believe that it is possible to teach someone, to instruct him or her. In his view, it is impossible to attain the reality underlying my world and that of others.

Small wonder that he does not hesitate to assert:

“There is no philosophy or belief or set of principles which I could encourage or persuade others to have or to hold. I can only try to live by my interpretation of the current meaning of my experience, and try to give others the permission and freedom to develop their own inward freedom and thus their own meaningful interpretation of their own experience. If there is such a thing as truth, this free individual process of search should, I believe, converge toward it. This is also what I seem to have experienced”.¹¹³

I realize that I have not really given an answer to the problem discussed in this memoir. I also feel dissatisfied with much of what I have expressed either because it has not been well expressed or because it has not been adequately reflected upon before being expressed.

However, I do hope that I have at least succeeded in showing that there is a real problem here, and that it merits one's attention and personal reflection. Rogers has dealt throughout his life with a type of knowledge which is mostly practical and which flows very intimately from

¹¹³ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 27.

man's freedom. The most essential element in being a person, according to him, is responsible personal choice; it is also the core experience in psychotherapy.¹¹⁴ Man is a person "in the process of creating himself, a person who creates meaning in life, a person who embodies a dimension of subjective freedom."¹¹⁵

But what, may I ask, is the meaning of man's freedom? What relation exists between man's freedom and his knowledge of reality?

¹¹⁴ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 400.

¹¹⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *Toward a Science of the Person*, in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Fall, 1963, p. 72-93, p. 89.

Epilogue 2018

As stated at the very beginning of this book, readers interested in further exploring my philosophical reflections on which are founded my critique of Rogers's solution to the problem of subjectivity and objectivity, are invited to consult my book *Life of the Mind According to Aimé Forest*. I will nevertheless attempt to point out very briefly a few of the main points in this critique. More specifically, I will provide a few insights indicating what path should be followed to overcome Rogers' dilemma between subjectivity and objectivity.

Rogers' statement that one can never know objective truth is self-contradictory

Rogers holds in very high esteem both the subjective knowledge that appears so fundamental in his experience as psychotherapist and the objective knowledge that, in his view, emerges from science and his training in logical positivism. However, he experiences a crisis because affirming the former seems to imply negating the latter. Affirming subjective knowing, and the profound freedom and uniqueness to which it is associated and on which the very heart of becoming a person depends, implies negating science, which rests on the discovery of laws, of regularities, of necessity, of that which is not unique but universally applicable.

Unable to abandon the freedom and uniqueness associated with that which is most fundamental both in therapy and in the process of becoming a person, Rogers ends up calling into question the very idea of scientific knowledge, which he identifies with objective truth. In other words, a truth that is universal and thus valid for all.

One never knows what is true. One only knows what one experiences or *perceives* to be true, asserts Rogers. This is what being congruent is all about. Realizing that there is no such thing as objective truth; acknowledging that all one can ever hope to possess is the *perception* of something as being objectively true.

From a philosophical perspective however, merely asserting, with certitude, that there is no such thing as objective truth becomes a dangerous and treacherous endeavor. For should Rogers ever be right in what he is asserting, should what he is asserting ever be true, then he would automatically be wrong! What Rogers is asserting is self-contradictory!

Rogers would be wrong, because at least in this one instance – no one can attain objective truth –, at least in this one basic assertion, what he is asserting would be true. It would be valid for everyone. It would not only *appear* to be valid, or be *perceived* as valid, it would simply BE valid.

Thus, if nothing can ever be objectively true, perhaps silence would be more befitting for Rogers than words, than assertions. Even more befitting than the assertion that truth does not exist, that one can never know objective truth.

This being said, Rogers does seem to suggest that objective truth does exist, for he asserts, “If there is such a thing as truth, this free individual process of search should, I believe, converge toward it. This is also what I seem to have experienced”.

His main message would perhaps be, then, *that one's own truth should never be imposed on anyone else*. A message very similar to that of the Catholic theologian, Gregory Baum. That it can only be discovered gradually, freely and through dialogue and one's own experiences and perceptions.

In 1962 the renowned behaviorist psychologist B. F. Skinner was having a debate with the equally renowned Carl Rogers – [A Dialogue on Education and Control](#) published on YouTube on 22 February 2016 (55 min.). In his opening remarks, Skinner told a story that he once heard about Carl Rogers and that zooms in on one of his main criticisms of the person-centered approach in psychotherapy.

“I was reminded of a story I once heard about Dr. Rogers, Skinner told the large audience. Rogers, who was never much of a duck hunter, was persuaded on one occasion to go duck hunting. He and some friends went into a blind and sat through a cold and early dreary dawn and no ducks arrived until the very end of the time when shooting was possible. Finally one lonely duck came in and his friends allowed him to shoot and he did. At the same time a few hundred yards away another man shot at the same duck. The duck fell: pluck! Dr. Rogers got out of the blind and started toward the duck. The other man got out of his blind and started toward the same duck. They arrived at the same moment. Dr. Rogers turned to him and said: *You FEEL that this is your duck.* (The audience bursts out in prolonged laughter).

“The reason I was reminded of this story, concludes Skinner, is that at the end of it Dr. Rogers brought the duck home!”

Overcoming dilemma between subjectivity and objectivity

Affirming science, to which Rogers identifies objective and solid knowledge, also leads to dead-ends and pitfalls.

Science for Rogers rests on the idea that everything is determined, that everything in the world can be measured, and that everything has a cause. Science discovers regularities, laws, etc. Because this is so, we can make

fantastic discoveries that improve the quality of life. We can even improve our therapeutic practices as psychotherapists, we can even dream of one day knowing absolutely everything about how a human being functions. “There seems more than the likelihood that psychotherapy is, by the efforts of various workers, being brought out of the realm of the mystical, the intuitive, the personal, the indefinable, into the full light of objective scrutiny”, asserts Rogers.

But this can be also dangerous, admits Rogers, because it can lead to the manipulation of the many by the few. It can lead to the destruction of what is most human, unique, and precious in the world.

Escaping this dilemma, this predicament, would mean, I believe, finding a way to preserve both subjective and objective knowing. Finding a way to preserve, also, both science and freedom. Finding a way to preserve both the regularities and laws one finds in the universe and in human behavior and that form the very oxygen of all scientific pursuit, and the profound blossoming of freedom that forms the heart and soul of the process of therapy and, more generally, the process of becoming a person.

Escaping this dilemma would mean fulfilling a dream that Rogers himself expressed beautifully in words that I quoted at the beginning of this book:

“I see a great need for creative thinking and theorizing in regard to the methods of social science. There is a widespread feeling in our group that the logical positivism in which we were professionally reared is not necessarily the final philosophical word in an area in which the phenomenon of subjectivity plays such a vital and central role. Have we evolved the optimal method for approximating the truth in this area? Is there some view, possibly developing out of an existential orientation, which might preserve the values of logical positivism and the

scientific advances which it has helped to foster and yet find more room for the existing subjective person who is at the heart and base even of our system of science? This is a highly speculative dream of an intangible goal, but I believe that many of us have a readiness to respond to the person or the persons who can evolve a tentative answer to the riddle.”¹¹⁶

Escaping this dilemma implies, in my opinion, calling into question the tenet according to which everything in the universe is measurable and can be operationalized. It means acknowledging the profound wisdom of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry when he asserts, “L’essentiel est invisible” (What really matters is invisible). It means recognizing that the scientific way of knowing is not the only way of knowing but only a more specialized and narrow way of knowing. It means acknowledging that the scientific way of knowing presupposes and rests on another primary, broad and much more important way of knowing that all humans are endowed with.

Some of Rogers’ assertions seem to suggest that he eventually acknowledged the limits of science and that it only plays a subservient and secondary role in the global human experience of knowing. He asserts that the scientist, “in the last analysis (...can) place more trust in his total organismic reactions (the latter reactions refer to what Rogers means by perceptual or subjective knowing) than in the methods of science”.¹¹⁷ And in the same 1962 debate that he held with the psychologist B. F. Skinner and to which I just referred – [A Dialogue on Education and Control](#) published on YouTube on 22 February 2016 (55 min.) – Rogers, after acknowledging that there is much that both Skinner and he agree on, bluntly states that Skinner

¹¹⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *A Theory of Therapy...* p. 251.

¹¹⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, p. 219.

basically ignores the fact that science is not the only, and indeed, the most fundamental way of knowing. “For you the scientific view is the whole world”, he says.

Escaping the dilemma between subjective and objective knowing means, I believe, finding a way to affirm the universal without automatically destroying what is unique, what is singular. It means acknowledging that the universal reached by scientific knowing is not the only possible universal, and, also more importantly, not the most fundamental one. It means acknowledging that the scientific universal, however valid, is only *univocal*; that it consists in the discovery of laws and regularities that express what diverse things have in common, but that leaves out all the rest, *l'essentiel qui est invisible*, that which really matters. It means recognizing the profound wisdom of the words of Shakespeare's Hamlet: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy”.

Escaping this dilemma means acknowledging another non-scientific type of universal; one that is not univocal but *analogical*. One that is similar to what Rogers asserts in his article *Experiencing: A Variable in the Process of Therapeutic Change*¹¹⁸ when he cites Gendlin: “Experiencing is *felt*, rather than thought, known or verbalized”; it is “a process of feeling rather than intellectual understanding”, a process which is preconceptual but guides conceptualization, a process pregnant with meaning, one that constantly tends to move from the implicit to the explicit. A universal that is analogical, that expresses the type of knowledge one finds in everyday life, and in particular in love, in beauty, in art, in poetry, in literature, and in religious experience. A universal that the young sculptor Michelangelo attempted

¹¹⁸ Harvard Educational Review, Vo. 32, no. 4, Fall 1962, p. 418-419.

to reach and express in his two masterpieces, the *Pietà* and *David*. A universal that the Spanish artist Antoni Gaudi attempted to reach and express in his still unfinished masterpiece the Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona.

A universal where universality does not automatically imply eliminating diversity and uniqueness but asserting these with greater force and strength. One where universality does not mean regularity, laws, and necessity, but rather fragility and contingency. One where universality is at home with existence, a fragile one, one that appears as a gift (birth) and passes away (death).

“We work hard and play hard not because we are more industrious or more playful than our ancestors but because we dare not stop lest in the stillness we are overwhelmed by the sound of our own anxieties and fears”, affirms Peter J. Gomes when commenting Paul Tillich’s, *The Courage to Be*.¹¹⁹

One finds presence or totality or universality by being present to *one unique being*. *By establishing a relationship with this one unique being*. A unique, and *totally irreplaceable* being... A being impossible to standardize, or reproduce, or digitalize. Fragile. Contingent. L’important, c’est la rose (Saint-Exupéry). To be, or not to be, that is the question (Shakespeare’s Hamlet).

This is the ecstasy that Carl Rogers says he sometimes experiences with his client in therapy.

Not by zooming in on one or more specific characteristics that millions of beings have in common. Not by concentrating, during one’s encounter with a client, on the theories one has studied as a therapist. Not by zooming in on what causes the cancer affecting millions of beings. Not

¹¹⁹ Peter J. Gomes, Introduction, in Paul Tillich’s *The Courage to Be*, second edition, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1952.

by identifying the life expectancy of millions, the rate of unemployment of millions, etc.

Another universal exists besides the universal attained by science. When one affirms this other, analogical universal, one does so while not only maintaining but also even highlighting what is fundamental and fundamentally unique in an individual being.

This is the heart of Aimé Forest's philosophy. One can consent to what is determined in the universe because one understands that there is a *beyond* within the determined. A beyond that ties all the diverse pieces of the puzzle of the universe into a single, meaningful picture. Unity and harmony perceived in the very heart of multiplicity. Nature viewed by the indigenous as something holistic and sacred. Something one does not simply use as a disposable input, but relates to as a mother, a sister.

Knowing in depth is not so much discovering laws and regularities about millions of human beings; it consists primarily in relating in depth to one, unique, and irreplaceable being. You mean the whole world to me. L'important, c'est la rose.

If, according to the idealism that characterizes much of contemporary thought, the only universal that knowledge can attain of being is univocal, then the mind is trapped. And to free itself, to escape from unintelligibility, from determination, singularity, and opaqueness, it must then turn away from being, withdraw into itself, concentrate on the act through which it perceives, the act through which it makes things come to awareness. L'enfer, c'est les autres, asserts Sartre. To free itself the mind must concentrate on perception as such, regardless of the object being perceived. "Je pense, donc je suis," asserts Descartes. What matters is that I'm thinking, not what I'm thinking about. Perception then appears as the heart of the matter. Congruence. Not objective truth. What I *perceive* as

objective truth. Not scientific truth. What I *perceive* as scientific truth.

According to Aimé Forest, realism, not the naïve realism that too often characterized the Middle Ages but a reflexive and refined realism, allows the mind to realize that concrete being, with all its determinateness, singularity, and finiteness, does not represent a threat. It allows the mind to view being as its light, as its source of intelligibility. However, this happens only if the mind adopts toward being the same welcoming attitude that Carl Rogers adopts toward his clients: an unconditional positive regard, benevolence, confidence, and empathy. Realism allows one, thanks to this profound attention, to discover the very heart of being, and to experience the intuition of being: an experience in which one relates to the other in depth, an experience in which the person knowing discovers his own self *in the very same act* in which he discovers the self of the other as other; an experience that is both presence, and a very unique one, and a form of absence or beyond... a calling toward the universal good.

Here, the knowing person (subject) encounters the other person (object of knowledge) in the very same act of knowledge.

All objective knowledge (knowledge oriented towards an object) is necessarily subjective (knowledge proceeding from a subject). The two are not at war, they are not in opposition. Knowing is fundamentally relating to, it is communion.

However, when one on the one hand identifies subjective knowing as that which occurs *inside* a person – this inside appearing separate from and alongside of the outside world, and this inside appearing as slippery, in constant movement, forever changing, and thus very uncertain and not trustworthy – and on the other hand identifies objective knowing as that which occurs *outside* of a person – as if it

were possible for knowledge to exist somewhere outside of people – as that which follows the rules of science, and thus measures and constantly seeks patterns, regularities, laws, knowledge that does not depend on emotions and moods, knowledge that is verifiable, certain and solid...

When one does this, that war breaks out between subjective and objective knowing is not at all surprising.

Overcoming this dilemma requires straightening out, correcting, one's conception of subjective knowing and one's conception of scientific knowing.

Subjective knowing is always simultaneously objective knowing. All acts of knowledge involve a subject and an object. The knower (subject) and the object known (object). Knowing is relating, it is communion.

Embracing what is unique and seeking universal good

At the very beginning of this book I spoke of the influence – worldview – that my parents and family, my long training to become a priest, and in particular both Carl Rogers and Aimé Forest had on me as an educator. Rogers' the psychotherapist emphasizes the importance of unconditional acceptance and welcoming. Forest the philosopher speaks of the importance of developing an attitude of acceptance and welcoming toward being. My former student, Valentina Solkin, asserts in her testimony, "You always felt like home to me. A welcoming, familiar place to be, where all is accepted and embraced".

The following foreword that I wrote – and that served for several consecutive trips – for the Field Trip Notebook used by North South students during their one-month long field trip to Nicaragua, illustrates the worldview to which I was exposed when I was young:

Living, to a considerable extent, consists in developing relationships. When these are abundant, warm, harmonious

and profound, life is intense and meaningful. When these are rare, cold, superficial, and conflictual, life appears difficult, and even boring and meaningless.

We started out as a group of strangers and we gradually became a community. We became a community through the various courses in which we participated in order to learn about North South issues, to learn Spanish and to learn about Nicaragua. We became a community through the various difficulties that we encountered as individuals, and through the help that we provided one another. We became a community through the dramatic events surrounding the shooting at Dawson on September 13, 2006, and the way we were there for each other in working through these very hard moments. We became a community through the challenges that we faced in our fundraising endeavors, our Friday meetings, the weekend spent at the cottage in the Laurentians.

During the field trip, as we integrate into our Nicaraguan host family, repair the roof of the community hall in El Carrizal or of the elementary school in Las Pozas, provide better infrastructure for the children in El Espino and La Uva, attend conferences on various aspects of Nicaraguan society, and discover day by day another culture, we will experience both joys and difficulties.

Through these, the ties that bond us to one another will be strengthened considerably.

May our photographs, our video footage, our field trip notes and especially our diaries allow us to capture the uniqueness of Nicaragua, of each one of our host families, of one another, and of the many precious moments spent together.

May they provide us with the dream of a better world: a world where we learn to live in harmony with our home, the environment; a world where the domination of a few

powerful countries over the many weaker ones is replaced by relations of dialogue and respect; a world where war is replaced by peace, conflict by collaboration, inequality of income and wealth by sharing. Above all, may they provide us with the will and energy to make that dream come true.

Bibliography

A complete bibliography of all of Rogers' publications as far as 1961 appears at the end of his book *On Becoming a Person*. (**Note added in 2018:** One can also find a more recent and updated list of Rogers' works on the Goodreads website:

https://www.goodreads.com/author/list/102062.Carl_R_Rogers)

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