

*The classic work on
the human potential for growth and creativity
by the pre-eminent American psychologist*

CARL R.
ROGERS
ON
BECOMING
A PERSON



On Becoming a Person
A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy

Carl R. Rogers



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To the Reader



THOUGH IT SHOCKS ME SOMEWHAT TO SAY SO, I have been a psychotherapist (or personal counselor) for more than thirty-three years. This means that during a period of a third of a century I have been trying to be of help to a broad sampling of our population: to children, adolescents and adults; to those with educational, vocational, personal and marital problems; to "normal," "neurotic," and "psychotic" individuals (the quotes indicate that for me these are all misleading labels); to individuals who come for help, and those who are sent for help; to those whose problems are minor, and to those whose lives have become utterly desperate and without hope. I regard it as a deep privilege to have had the opportunity to know such a diverse multitude of people so personally and intimately.

Out of the clinical experience and research of these years I have written several books and many articles. The papers in this volume are selected from those I have written during the most recent ten of the thirty-three years, from 1951 to 1961. I would like to explain the reasons that I have for gathering them into a book.

In the first place I believe that almost all of them have relevance for personal living in this perplexing modern world. This is in no sense a book of advice, nor does it in any way resemble the "do-it-yourself" treatise, but it has been my experience that readers of these papers have often found them challenging and enriching. They have to some small degree given the person more security in making and following his personal choices as he endeavors to move toward being the person he would like to be. So for this reason I should like to have them more widely available to any

who might be interested—to “the intelligent layman,” as the phrase goes. I feel this especially since all of my previous books have been published for the professional psychological audience, and have never been readily available to the person outside of that group. It is my sincere hope that many people who have no particular interest in the field of counseling or psychotherapy will find that the learnings emerging in this field will strengthen them in their own living. It is also my hope and belief that many people who have never sought counseling help will find, as they read the excerpts from the recorded therapy interviews of the many clients in these pages, that they are subtly enriched in courage and self confidence, and that understanding of their own difficulties will become easier as they live through, in their imagination and feeling, the struggles of others toward growth.

Another influence which has caused me to prepare this book is the increasing number and urgency of requests from those who are already acquainted with my point of view in counseling, psychotherapy, and interpersonal relationships. They have made it known that they wish to be able to obtain accounts of my more recent thinking and work in a convenient and available package. They are frustrated by hearing of unpublished articles which they cannot acquire; by stumbling across papers of mine in out-of-the-way journals; they want them brought together. This is a flattering request for any author. It also constitutes an obligation which I have tried to fulfill. I hope that they will be pleased with the selection I have made. Thus in this respect this volume is for those psychologists, psychiatrists, teachers, educators, school counselors, religious workers, social workers, speech therapists, industrial leaders, labor-management specialists, political scientists and others who have in the past found my work relevant to their professional efforts. In a very real sense, it is dedicated to them.

There is another motive which has impelled me, a more complex and personal one. This is the search for a suitable audience for what I have to say. For more than a decade this problem has puzzled me. I know that I speak to only a fraction of psychologists. The majority—their interests suggested by such terms as stimulus-response, learning theory, operant conditioning—are so committed to

seeing the individual solely as an object, that what I have to say often baffles if it does not annoy them. I also know that I speak to but a fraction of psychiatrists. For many, perhaps most of them, the truth about psychotherapy has already been voiced long ago by Freud, and they are uninterested in new possibilities, and uninterested in or antagonistic to research in this field. I also know that I speak to but a portion of the divergent group which call themselves counselors. The bulk of this group are primarily interested in predictive tests and measurements, and in methods of guidance.

So when it comes to the publication of a particular paper, I have felt dissatisfied with presenting it to a professional journal in any one of these fields. I have published articles in journals of each of these types, but the majority of my writings in recent years have piled up as unpublished manuscripts, distributed privately in mimeographed form. They symbolize my uncertainty as to how to reach whatever audience it is I am addressing.

During this period journal editors, often of small or highly specialized journals, have learned of some of these papers, and have requested permission to publish. I have always acceded to these requests, with the proviso that I might wish to publish the paper elsewhere at some later time. Thus the majority of the papers I have written during this decade have been unpublished, or have seen the light of day in some small, or specialized, or off-beat journal.

Now however I have concluded that I wish to put these thoughts out in book form so that they can seek their *own* audience. I am sure that that audience will cut across a variety of disciplines, some of them as far removed from my own field as philosophy and the science of government. Yet I have come to believe that the audience will have a certain unity, too. I believe these papers belong in a trend which is having and will have its impact on psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, and other fields. I hesitate to label such a trend but in my mind there are associated with it adjectives such as phenomenological, existential, person-centered; concepts such as self-actualization, becoming, growth; individuals (in this country) such as Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May. Hence, though the group to which this book speaks meaningfully will, I believe, come from many disciplines, and have many wide-ranging

interests, a common thread may well be their concern about the person and his becoming, in a modern world which appears intent upon ignoring or diminishing him.

There is one final reason for putting out this book, a motive which means a great deal to me. It has to do with the great, in fact the desperate, need of our times for more basic knowledge and more competent skills in dealing with the tensions in human relationships. Man's awesome scientific advances into the infinitude of space as well as the infinitude of sub-atomic particles seems most likely to lead to the total destruction of our world unless we can make great advances in understanding and dealing with interpersonal and inter-group tensions. I feel very humble about the modest knowledge which has been gained in this field. I hope for the day when we will invest at least the price of one or two large rockets in the search for more adequate understanding of human relationships. But I also feel keenly concerned that the knowledge we *have* gained is very little recognized and little utilized. I hope it may be clear from this volume that we *already* possess learnings which, put to use, would help to decrease the inter-racial, industrial, and international tensions which exist. I hope it will be evident that these learnings, used preventively, could aid in the development of mature, nondefensive, understanding persons who would deal constructively with future tensions as they arise. If I can thus make clear to a significant number of people the unused resource knowledge already available in the realm of interpersonal relationships, I will feel greatly rewarded.

So much for my reasons for putting forth this book. Let me conclude with a few comments as to its nature. The papers which are brought together here represent the major areas of my interest during the past decade.* They were prepared for different purposes, usually for different audiences, or formulated simply for my own satisfaction. I have written for each chapter an introductory

* The one partial exception is in the area of explicit theory of personality. Having just recently published a complete and technical presentation of my theories in a book which should be available in any professional library, I have not tried to include such material here. The reference referred to is my chapter entitled, "A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework" in Koch, S. (ed.) *Psychology: A Study of a Science*, vol. III, pp. 184-256. McGraw-Hill, 1959.

note which tries to set the material in an understandable context. I have organized the papers in such a way that they portray a unified and developing theme from the highly personal to the larger social significance. In editing them, I have eliminated duplication, but where different papers present the same concept in different ways I have often retained these "variations on a theme" hoping that they might serve the same purpose as in music, namely to enrich the meaning of the melody. Because of their origin as separate papers, each one can be read independently of the others if the reader so desires.

Stated in the simplest way, the purpose of this book is to share with you something of my experience—something of me. Here is what I have experienced in the jungles of modern life, in the largely unmapped territory of personal relationships. Here is what I have seen. Here is what I have come to believe. Here are the ways I have tried to check and test my beliefs. Here are some of the perplexities, questions, concerns and uncertainties which I face. I hope that out of this sharing you may find something which speaks to you.

Departments of Psychology and Psychiatry
The University of Wisconsin
April, 1961

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PART I

Speaking Personally

*I speak as a person, from a context
of personal experience and personal learnings.*



1

“This is Me” The Development of My Professional Thinking and Personal Philosophy



This chapter combines two very personal talks. Five years ago I was asked to speak to the senior class at Brandeis University to present, not my ideas of psychotherapy, but myself. How had I come to think the thoughts I had? How had I come to be the person I am? I found this a very thought-provoking invitation, and I endeavored to meet the request of these students. During this past year the Student Union Forum Committee at Wisconsin made a somewhat similar request. They asked me to speak in a personal vein on their “Last Lecture” series, in which it is assumed that, for reasons unspecified, the professor is giving his last lecture and therefore giving quite personally of himself. (It is an intriguing comment on our educational system that it is assumed that only under the most dire circumstances would a professor reveal himself in any personal way.) In this Wisconsin talk I expressed more fully than in the first one the personal learnings or philosophical themes which have come to have meaning for me. In the current chapter I have woven together both of these talks, trying to retain something of the informal character which they had in their initial presentation.

The response to each of these talks has made me realize how hun-

gry people are to know something of the person who is speaking to them or teaching them. Consequently I have set this chapter first in the book in the hope that it will convey something of me, and thus give more context and meaning to the chapters which follow.



I HAVE BEEN INFORMED that what I am expected to do in speaking to this group is to assume that my topic is "This is Me." I feel various reactions to such an invitation, but one that I would like to mention is that I feel honored and flattered that any group wants, in a personal sense, to know who I am. I can assure you it is a unique and challenging sort of invitation, and I shall try to give to this honest question as honest an answer as I can.

So, who am I? I am a psychologist whose primary interest, for many years, has been in psychotherapy. What does that mean? I don't intend to bore you with a long account of my work, but I would like to take a few paragraphs from the preface to my book, *Client-Centered Therapy*, to indicate in a subjective way what it means to me. I was trying to give the reader some feeling for the subject matter of the volume, and I wrote as follows. "What is this book about? Let me try to give an answer which may, to some degree, convey the living experience that this book is intended to be.

"This book is about the suffering and the hope, the anxiety and the satisfaction, with which each therapist's counseling room is filled. It is about the uniqueness of the relationship each therapist forms with each client, and equally about the common elements which we discover in all these relationships. This book is about the highly personal experiences of each one of us. It is about a client in my office who sits there by the corner of the desk, struggling to be himself, yet 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. This book is about me, as I sit there with that client, facing him, participating in that struggle as deeply and sensitively as I am able. It is about me as I try to perceive his experience, and the

meaning and the feeling and the taste and the flavor that it has for him. It is about me as I bemoan my very human fallibility in understanding that client, and the occasional failures to see life as it appears to him, failures which fall like heavy objects across the intricate, delicate web of growth which is taking place. It is about me as I rejoice at the privilege of being a midwife to a new personality — as I stand by with awe at the emergence of a self, a person, as I see a birth process in which I have had an important and facilitating part. It is about both the client and me as we regard with wonder the potent and orderly forces which are evident in this whole experience, forces which seem deeply rooted in the universe as a whole. The book is, I believe, about life, as life vividly reveals itself in the therapeutic process — with its blind power and its tremendous capacity for destruction, but with its overbalancing thrust toward growth, if the opportunity for growth is provided."

Perhaps that will give you some picture of what I do and the way I feel about it. I presume you may also wonder how I came to engage in that occupation, and some of the decisions and choices, conscious and unconscious, which were made along the way. Let me see if I can give you some of the psychological highlights of my autobiography, particularly as it seems to relate to my professional life.

MY EARLY YEARS

I was brought up in a home marked by close family ties, a very strict and uncompromising religious and ethical atmosphere, and what amounted to a worship of the virtue of hard work. I came along as the fourth of six children. My parents cared a great deal for us, and had our welfare almost constantly in mind. They were also, in many subtle and affectionate ways, very controlling of our behavior. It was assumed by them and accepted by me that we were different from other people — no alcoholic beverages, no dancing, cards or theater, very little social life, and *much* work. I have a hard time convincing my children that even carbonated beverages had a faintly sinful aroma, and I remember my slight feeling of wickedness when I had my first bottle of "pop." We had good times together within the family, but we did not mix. So I was a

pretty solitary boy, who read incessantly, and went all through high school with only two dates.

When I was twelve my parents bought a farm and we made our home there. The reasons were twofold. My father, having become a prosperous business man, wanted it for a hobby. More important, I believe, was the fact that it seemed to my parents that a growing adolescent family should be removed from the "temptations" of suburban life.

Here I developed two interests which have probably had some real bearing on my later work. I became fascinated by the great night-flying moths (Gene Stratton-Porter's books were then in vogue) and I became an authority on the gorgeous Luna, Polyphemus, Cecropia and other moths which inhabited our woods. I laboriously bred the moths in captivity, reared the caterpillars, kept the cocoons over the long winter months, and in general realized some of the joys and frustrations of the scientist as he tries to observe nature.

My father was determined to operate his new farm on a scientific basis, so he bought many books on scientific agriculture. He encouraged his boys to have independent and profitable ventures of our own, so my brothers and I had a flock of chickens, and at one time or other reared from infancy lambs, pigs and calves. In doing this I became a student of scientific agriculture, and have only realized in recent years what a fundamental feeling for science I gained in that way. There was no one to tell me that Morison's *Feeds and Feeding* was not a book for a fourteen-year-old, so I ploughed through its hundreds of pages, learning how experiments were conducted—how control groups were matched with experimental groups, how conditions were held constant by randomizing procedures, so that the influence of a given food on meat production or milk production could be established. I learned how difficult it is to test an hypothesis. I acquired a knowledge of and a respect for the methods of science in a field of practical endeavor.

COLLEGE AND GRADUATE EDUCATION

I started in college at Wisconsin in the field of agriculture. One of the things I remember best was the vehement statement of an