

# ROGERS, JUNG AND THE POSTMODERN CONDITION<sup>1</sup>

*Bernie Neville*

My purpose in this paper is not so much to draw parallels between Carl Jung and Carl Rogers as to talk about Rogers within a Jungian framework.

In discussing Rogers I want to draw attention to so-called "postmodern" aspects of his thinking, but my main interest is in a particular kind of complexity I find in his ideas. More than anything else it has to do with the recognition of the paradoxes inherent in the person-centred approach, paradoxes that I believe should be acknowledged rather than explained away.

I do not want to say much about Jung. Rather, I want to use his notion of archetype to frame my reflections on the person-centred approach. The notion of archetype is central to Jung's psychology, and archetypal psychology has become a useful tool for cultural analysis as well as an approach to individual therapy. Jung was intrigued by the recurring patterns he found in his clients' behaviour and imaginings, patterns which could not readily be understood in terms of learning, and he found collective behaviour to be patterned in the same ways. He went back to Plato's notion of archetype in an attempt to explain this. Jung, following Plato, was inclined to understand archetypes as pre-existent forms which are replicated again and again in nature and in our experience, forms which are not knowable in themselves and whose primary manifestation is through what he called "archetypal images". James Hillman, the central contemporary figure in this school of thought, does not make Jung's distinction between the archetype per se and the archetypal image, nor his distinction between the personal and collective aspects of the unconscious, so that for him every image is an archetypal image, and these archetypal images structure all our experience and behaviour. For Hillman, the proper work of psychology is seeing through our personal and collective experience to the archetypal images which shape them.<sup>1</sup>

Hillman's argument takes him inevitably into a multi-perspectivist understanding of reality. As a framework for his multi-perspectivism he takes the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon. Each of the gods personifies a "mode of apprehension" (Jung's term), which gives distinct and observable shape to our encounter with the world. Distinct but not discrete, for the archetypal patterns interpenetrate in ways which are represented by the relationships (familial and erotic) between the gods. The Greek pantheon is chosen because its images are embedded in European culture – even in the culture of positivist science.

---

<sup>1</sup>"Rogers, Jung und die Postmoderne". In R. Stipsits and R. Hutterer (eds) *Perspektiven Psychotherapie*, Wuv. Universitätsverlag, Vienna. 1992, 172-198.

If all human behaviour is archetypally constellated, we should be able to see through any philosophical system or political ideology to the images that give it its form. This should apply no less to the theories and methodologies of psychotherapy. Each therapy will be a manifestation of a mode of apprehension, a value system, a form of energy, a notion of truth and a vision of the good life which can be personified in a god.

## **Many Gods, Many Therapies**

The first off the Greek gods is Zeus. Zeus is the Father of the gods, the Patriarchy personified, generally benevolent but ready to punish if annoyed. He is sometimes grouped with the older, pre-Olympian gods – Uranus, Cronos, Saturn – as the Senex, the Old Man, the image both of autocratic power and of ancient and unchanging wisdom. When the Senex is supreme in a society, therapy as we understand it in this forum has no place. Political or religious authority tells people how to live and that is the end of it. Where patriarchal power is breaking down, the Senex counsellor may take the client, as Freud did, from a state of hysterical desperation to the state of "ordinary unhappiness" that comes with adjustment to the strictures of society. It has been argued that, regardless of the intentions or ideology of the therapist, the political function of therapy is to soften dissent and to divert challenge to an oppressive political system. There are plenty of Senex counsellors still around in a society where patriarchal power is no longer assumed to rule by absolute right. They have unambiguous notions of right and wrong, and their mode of counselling is to advise their clients how they should live. There are many clients who seek only this from their counsellors.

Hera, queen of the Olympian gods is the archetypal Image of marriage, of family, of social bonds and social roles. Her authority supports that of Zeus. A therapy grounded in such values will be socially conservative, based on notions of social rights, obligations and duties, and the maintenance of proper roles. Hera has no problem with giving advice, and her advice is likely to focus on the need to adjust to society's demands. Systems approaches to therapy come out of a Hera perspective, and it is no coincidence that they provide family therapy with its orthodoxy.

Demeter is the Mother. A therapy which functions by providing the kind of support and nourishment which encourages growth in the client belongs to Demeter. So does the therapy which controls by giving and withdrawing affection, and the therapy which develops emotional dependence.

Apollo is the god of clarity, reason and understanding. He has been powerfully present in some therapies, notably psychoanalysis, logotherapy and cognitive therapy, which are shaped in different ways by the notion that human beings have a basic urge to understand, to find meaning, and that

change in behaviour tends to follow more or less inevitably on the insights gained through therapy. It should be noted that Apollo is notoriously inept in his relationships.

Artemis is the goddess of the moon, of sisterhood, of untouched nature. She is most obviously present in radical feminist therapies, for she has no interest in giving men power or pleasure. She cares for the new-born and fragile, and sees the good life as one lived in harmony with nature and its rhythms.

By contrast, Athene is the goddess who accommodates the feminine to the patriarchal world. She is the warrior goddess, the goddess of common sense, the goddess of expertise and professionalism, of civilisation. She is, significantly, goddess of democracy. We find her in therapies based on the sharing of power between therapist and client, and in therapies whose aim is the sharing of understandings and the solving of problems rather than the sharing of feelings and the building of relationships. Feelings and relationships are not of much interest to her.

Ares, god of war, might not seem to have much of a contribution to make to therapy, but we can find him present in confrontative therapies and in the confrontational style of therapists from many persuasions. We find him wherever the counsellor challenges the client to fight. We find him in a somewhat domesticated form in assertiveness training. Ares is not terribly smart, and prefers the simplistic solution, but he is passionate and certainly knows how to stimulate action.

Hephaistos, the craftsman, forms the perspective of the counsellor who sees counselling essentially as a craft. In Greek myth, Hephaistos is the only god who does any work. He is the god who convinces us that the creation of something beautiful is worth long hours of hard and intensely focused work, slaving over the forge. He is wedded to Beauty, (Aphrodite) but in spite of his obsession with her, and the toil and pain of his crafting, he never manages to please her.

Aphrodite has many aspects. She is most commonly worshipped under the aspect of sexual attractiveness, but she is also the god of spiritual beauty. In any case, under one aspect or another, she is the driving force behind much of what we do in counselling as anywhere else. Leaving aside the psychoanalytic notions of transference and projection, and leaving aside the all too frequent cases of sexual exploitation, it is arguable that therapy often works by way of seduction, so that the attractiveness of a therapist's personality or the attractiveness of a therapist's view of life makes a powerful contribution to the client's healing. For the Aphrodite-driven therapist, counselling is an aesthetic activity – an art rather than a science or a craft.

The son of Aphrodite is Eros, the god of relationship, who is central to most humanistic conceptions of therapy. Eros has his own truth, that healing occurs through the coming together of therapist and client in a relationship which is truly mutual and truly caring. For Eros, the key ingredient of successful therapy is love.

Dionysos, the god of "the flow", of fertility, growth, impulse, and spontaneity, of spiritual ecstasy and emotional freedom. is fervently worshipped by psychodramatists, and by different species of expressive therapists. As the Divine Child, the god of death and resurrection, he is worshipped also by rebirthers and holotropic therapists. Our society, no less that of Greece, is inclined to regard his activities as subversive of good order and morality. No less than the Greeks we pay a heavy price when we ignore him.

Hestia is the quiet goddess, the goddess of the hearth, of focus and centring. Therapies which work through meditative introspection, such as psychosynthesis and experiential focusing, carry her power. She is responsible for the healing which comes simply through being still.

Classical psychoanalysis and classical behaviourism, grounded as they are in the mechanistic and positivistic assumptions of nineteenth century science, point to the myth of Prometheus, the ancient hero who stole fire from heaven and taught men how to use it to gain control of the world and free themselves from the power of the gods. The Promethean fantasy of emancipation through technology also drives such diverse therapies as neurolinguistic programming, biofeedback and biomedical psychiatry.

And so on. Each archetype is manifested in its particular perspective on the world, its peculiar system of values, its own pathology, its own vision, its own methodology, and the particular energy which drives it. Each god has its own truth and its own morality. Reality is not single and simple, but multiple and complex.

Yet even this statement about the nature of reality is archetypally constellated. When we look at the world and see not the one truth but relative and local truths, when we see not facts but images, when we acknowledge the paradoxical and the irrational, we are taking a particular archetypal perspective – the perspective of Hermes. I suggest that Hermes is the god of a postmodern consciousness and provides the energy and the vision of both Jungian and Rogerian therapy..

## **In praise of Hermes**

The Homeric Hymn to Hermes<sup>2</sup> tells us how, to avoid the anger of Hera, Maia, a nymph who was Zeus' lover, dwelt in a deep cave, where she bore a son to Zeus – the very crafty, the super-subtle, Hermes: thief, cattle rustler, carrier of dreams, secret agent.

The hymn shows Hermes as a most precocious infant who, as he leaves the cave on the day he was born, comes across a tortoise. First he plays with it as any child might, then he kills it and makes a lyre out of its shell. Accompanying himself on this instrument, he sings the very first song, which is about his parents' love-making.

Having joyfully and ironically sung of his parents, he moves on to other things. He feels a craving for meat, so he leaves his lyre in his cradle and sets out to find some. For a rogue like Hermes, there is one

utterly obvious way to obtain the meat he craves. He steals it. When twilight falls he seeks out the cattle of Apollo where they are grazing, and cuts fifty of them out of the herd.

To fool Apollo, he drives the cows backwards so they look as though they are walking the other way, and makes himself a pair of sandals out of foliage, to disguise his own footprints. Having invented stringed instruments, songs and sandals, he now invents the fire-stick, and builds a fire. Next he invents both cookery and religious sacrifice. He takes two of the cows he has stolen, slaughters and roasts them. By this time he has obviously forgotten about his hunger for, instead of making a banquet for himself, he takes the meat (which he stole from the gods in the first place) and offers it to the gods, making sure that he divides the carcasses into twelve equal pieces, counting himself as a god alongside the eleven Olympians. Having performed the sacrifice, Hermes returns to his cradle, and lies gurgling and playing like any baby. His mother scolds him for his thieving, at which Hermes vigorously declares his intention of becoming the Prince of Robbers, so he can support the two of them in the manner to which they feel entitled.

The next day, Apollo arrives at the cave, having tracked the cows there, and angrily confronts his baby brother Hermes. Hermes lies shamelessly. He declares that he was only born yesterday, which is true enough, and then goes on to swear by the head of Zeus that he has never seen a cow in his life. Apollo won't accept this and picks up the baby Hermes to carry him to their father Zeus for judgement. Before the throne of Zeus, Hermes continues to lie, well knowing that nobody believes him, and eventually charms his way out of punishment by winking at Zeus while Apollo is not looking, causing Zeus to laugh. Nevertheless, Zeus exacts from Hermes a promise not to lie again (though he need not necessarily tell the truth!) and sends his sons off together to find the cattle. Realising Hermes' great strength, Apollo tries to bind his hands together. But Hermes the illusionist is far too slippery a character to be bound. Hermes then charms Apollo completely by playing his lyre.

So entranced is Apollo that he gladly exchanges his cattle for the lyre. Apollo takes responsibility for music while Hermes becomes the god of herdsmen and shepherds (as well as cattle rustlers) and of barter and negotiation (as well as stealing and deception). They become the best of friends. Hermes promises never to steal from Apollo again. He receives from Apollo his staff, or magic wand, for it is fitting that he should be a god of magic and illusion. Finally, he is designated herald and messenger of the gods, and given the task of guiding souls to the underworld.

And Hermes mingles now with all men and gods. And even though he helps a few people, he cheats an endless number of the race of mortal men in the darkness of night.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Age of Hermes**

The gods are always squabbling, and no one god ever has the field entirely to himself or herself. However, in culture as in personal psychology, we often find one god dominant. Jung used the term *inflation* to denote the takeover of a personality or society by a single archetypal image and energy. The most obvious example at the personal level is the Eros-inflation we experience when we fall obsessively in love. An obvious example at the societal level is the Wotan-inflation of Nazi Germany, or the Ares-inflation of a nation enthusiastically at war. If we adopt this language it is not difficult to categorise the culture of many developed nations, caught up in a fantasy of a deregulated market supported by an explosion of information technology, as a Hermes-inflation, just as we can categorise the Apollo-inflation of the Age of Enlightenment, the Dionysos-inflation of the Romantic Movement, and the Prometheus-inflation of the Industrial Era which appears to be coming to an end. This Hermes-inflation is manifested not only in the concrete realities of mobility, exchange, and communication technology, in the ubiquity of the marketplace and the images of popular culture, but also in the abstractions of philosophers. It is reflected also in the assumptions and methods of postmodern therapies which are now competing with the Promethean therapies of the modern, industrial era.

Jean Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition<sup>4</sup> focuses on a number of specific features which can be referred to only briefly here. He points out that what most characterises developed societies in the current era is the enormous expansion and constant exchange of information. Information exchange has come to be an end in itself. We live in a sea of information, more than any human mind can hope to hold. And it no longer matters whether anybody knows anything, as information can now exist independently of minds which might create it or possess it. The existence of the people who know has become unimportant; all that matters now is the existence of the connections between people that allow information to be transmitted.

Another feature of the postmodern condition, in Lyotard's analysis is the all-pervasive influence of the marketplace. Everything is for sale or for barter. Knowledge, care, skill, healing, even relationship, are now bought and sold as a matter of course. The short term contract has largely taken the place of the long term obligation. Furthermore, the volume and speed of information exchange has led to the decline of orthodoxy. Postmodern societies are not grounded on an assumption of shared meanings. The "grand narratives" of christianity, marxism, and rationalistic humanism that framed the thinking of previous generations have largely been abandoned, and are being replaced by the heterogeneity and diversity of local narratives".

In a postmodern society, we are constantly bombarded with images, and no longer assume that these images have a necessary connection to an underlying reality. It is not simply that we take it for granted that media and advertising images are meant to deceive or persuade us rather than accurately represent "the facts", but we have become increasingly reluctant to believe that "the facts" (whether of current affairs or of astrophysics), are knowable. This may lead us into an aesthetic rather than

rational/technical approach to the world, and to a notion of human life as a fairly desperate species of play, rather than as a purposeful and meaningful encounter with a substantive reality.

We are in the process of abandoning the heroic fantasy of control, which has dominated our thought and action for a couple of hundred years. Science is being forced to give up the view of the universe and all its individual parts as machines whose workings will eventually be comprehended and controlled to free us from ignorance, poverty and even (perhaps) death, and is learning to live with ambiguity, discontinuity, chaos and infinite complexification. It is also gradually abandoning the clear mind-matter distinction which has been its basic assumption for the last three centuries.

Both Jungian and Rogerian theory seem to reflect this kind of intellectual sensibility. Jung and Rogers, for all their differences, both initially embraced the Apollonine fantasy of constructing a self-contained and systematic theory to account for human personality and later abandoned it. Both decided that reality is not directly knowable, and constructed their theories of therapy around the notion that it is our perceptions or images of reality which determine our behaviour rather than reality itself. Both were able to see meaning as something we construct rather than something we are given, both rejected the popular mechanistic fantasy which would explain the client's behaviour entirely in terms of his or her response to external stimuli, and insisted on acknowledging the central place of subjectivity. Even in their obvious differences, as between a Jungian analysis which points to the ancient and universal patterns which are manifested in the client's behaviour and the Rogerian counselling which focuses on the uniqueness of the client's internal world in the present moment, they both represent a postmodern sensibility which honours image and process, reflects on its own reflections, and acknowledges with appropriate humility that human logic is not on its own an adequate instrument to appreciate the complexity of the universe.

The images of exchange and information are the central images of the Hermes myth. We find in the myth all the themes which Lyotard points to as being characteristic of the intellectual sensibility of late capitalism. Hermes has always been perceived as the messenger, the god of communication. Loving disguise as he does, he is pre-eminently the god of the media in the post modern era, when communication is intimately associated with illusion and deceit, when image is no longer assumed to be associated with an underlying reality. Not only are things not necessarily what they seem, but we do not assume that there are any things behind the seeming. Hermes makes no ethical distinction between the lie and the truth. For him, as for the postmodern philosopher, there is no truth, no meaning, only interpretation. For him, as for the postmodern writer, there is no essential distinction between fact and fiction. We find in the Homeric hymn to Hermes what Derrida would find in a post-structuralist consciousness: "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming"<sup>5</sup>. Hermes is inventive, but has no commitment to his inventions, not even to his music. He certainly gets pleasure from its beauty, and values it as a marketable commodity, but his attitude to music is in marked contrast to that of Apollo, who is happy to give up his herd to gain and keep it.

Hermes is depicted in classical mythology as a decidedly unheroic character. There in a scene in the Iliad where the gods line up on one side or another in the Trojan War, and Hermes finds himself face to face with the powerful and ancient goddess Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis. Hermes persuades her that rather than fight him she should just go and boast to the other gods about how she has defeated him by brute strength. He is quite happy to go along with her story. In a postmodern consciousness we have abandoned the fantasy of the Promethean hero who gains control of the forces of nature. We are also witnessing the disappearance of the hero from the postmodern novel and the downgrading of the heroic ego in postmodern theories of personality.

So what are the characteristics of therapy in the Age of Hermes?

## **A Postmodern Profession**

The first of these characteristics is its marketability. The very development of counselling as a profession is a manifestation of the shift of consciousness which Karl Marx saw emerging in nineteenth century Europe.

... the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given but never sold; acquired but never bought - virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc. - when everything, in short, passed into commerce.<sup>6</sup>

Counselling may be a noble profession, but its context is the replacement of social relations based on bonds of family or loyalty by social relations which are loose, temporary, and freely traded. In this marketplace the temporary contract is rapidly taking the place of the permanent institution. The contracts, naturally, become more important than the people who are, after all, interchangeable. And there is a constant pressure to value these contracts solely at their market value.

Another characteristic is its relativism. A Senex therapy will maintain the sanctity of patriarchal power; a Hera therapy maintains the sanctity of societal bonds; for an Eros therapy love is the ultimate value; for a Dionysos therapy what really heals is the intensity of experience. Just as Hermes worships all the gods, including himself, so a postmodern therapy values all goods equally and nothing absolutely, (except the value of valuing all goods equally). It is non-judgmental, flexible, prepared to acknowledge the validity of all perspectives and value systems. This may lead on the one hand to a polytheistic therapy such as Hillman espouses, which insists that all the gods he honoured or, on the other, to a nihilism which, because it recognises no absolutes, effectively values nothing. In the groundlessness of much postmodern writing, which cannot commit itself to actually believing in anything, we experience the myth of Hermes whose winged feet never touch the ground, who carries messages for others but has no message of his own. We may find the same Hermes-pathology in postmodern approaches to therapy.

Hence, a postmodern therapy is likely to be eclectic. No theory or technique can be preferred over another, so we end up with a pastiche, a bit of this and a bit of that, like the pastiche of postmodern art or architecture. Hermes is the god of thieves, and a Hermes therapy will steal whatever it wants wherever it happens to find it. If the borrowed or stolen bits of theory and practice may appear to contradict each other. This is perceived not as a problem but as a rich and rewarding paradox, the reflection of a paradoxical universe.

We should note that to distinguish between a positive and a negative, or a healthy and a pathological, or even a nice and a nasty in Hermes, we have to move outside the Hermes perspective. It is Apollo who makes such distinctions, and it is the other gods who proclaim the ethical systems which Hermes appears to ignore (e.g. Zeus' ethics of law, Hera's ethics of social stability, Aphrodite's ethics of beauty, Eros' ethics of relationship). For Hermes there is no ethical distinction to be made between truth and lying, between buying and stealing, between honest and dishonest dealing. Such distinctions are simply irrelevant to him, as they seem to be to many a postmodern entrepreneur.

A postmodern therapy will have abandoned any fantasy of a conflict between good and evil (however these might be conceived), and any notion of life as an heroic quest in which demons and dragons must be conquered. The heroic ego is a fantasy of the fading Promethean consciousness in which man (women are regarded as a nuisance in Promethean mythology) was to conquer his external and internal worlds through science and technology. The shift from Freud's "Where there was id, there ego shall be" to Lacanian psychoanalysis, in which exploration seems to have no point apart from the exploration itself, represents a shift from the image of the defiant hero Prometheus to that of Hermes the traveller. A postmodern therapy will take it as given that the client is travelling in some direction, but will not have any commitment to one direction as being more appropriate than another.

This postmodern emphasis on process is manifest in the humanistic therapies, most notably in gestalt. We are inclined to take such an emphasis for granted now, and forget how exciting and subversive the ideas of Rogers and Perls were when they first appeared. Perls was a much more devoted worshipper of Hermes than Rogers was, and carried in his personality many of the features of the Hermes image – his emphasis on dialogue, his lack of interest in content, the slipperiness of his logic, his narcissistic grandiosity, his irresponsibility, his tireless pursuit of the nymphs. Hermes the inventor and entrepreneur, the manipulator and prankster, is powerfully present in his therapy.

Hermes the manipulator and prankster is also present in Eriksonian therapy and in neurolinguistic programming. To my observation, the development of NLP seems to reflect a struggle between the Promethean mode (which is interested in discovering how things work and in using this knowledge to liberate people from whatever it is that controls them) and the Hermetic mode (which enjoys deviousness and trickery for their own sake, loves untying complicated knots, regards ethics as irrelevant to its work. and has a good eye for the market).

One feature of postmodern thinking, whether in the sophisticated analyses of the philosophers or in the artifacts of popular culture, is an interest in the unconscious, the nonrational, the mystical and the aesthetic. Jung rather belatedly abandoned his loyalty to the positivistic and rationalistic assumptions of nineteenth century science and recognised that his work belonged to Hermes, rather than Apollo or Prometheus. For him Hermes was the magician, the guide to the underworld, the bearer of secret knowledge. Freud clung to his conviction that psychoanalysis is a science, but many of his followers have abandoned that fantasy and value psychoanalysis as an art like poetry or painting rather than as an exact applied science like engineering. Various kinds of dreamwork reflect a postmodern consciousness, as do the assorted varieties of transpersonal therapy, which appear to be a secular analogue of what used to be called religious experience.

Following Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition, we might expect to see a focus on image in contemporary therapies. We find this not only in the Freudian and Jungian traditions, but in many other approaches to counselling: in psychodrama, in psychosynthesis, in Gendlin's experiential psychotherapy, in family therapy, in the pop self-therapies which line the bookshelves in the New Age section of the local bookshop.

If Zeus or Apollo is strong in us we are likely to look on the development of a postmodern consciousness with dismay, and hope that after this minor aberration humanity will get back to its proper business of conserving and handing on the wisdom of the past, of establishing and preserving the good life, and of seeking, through science, to understand the universe. If Hermes is strong in us, we may welcome the postmodern as a significant new phase in the development of human consciousness. After all, the myth points to Hermes as the moment of transition from a materialistic to a spiritual consciousness, from a patristic culture to a matristic one. In any case, it appears that the world in which we work is characterised by an intellectual sensibility which, whatever we call it and however we imagine it, is distinctly different from that of previous generations.

How do client-centred therapy and the person-centred approach reflect this intellectual sensibility?

Many of the themes which are central to Rogers' thinking – subjectivity, conceptual relativism, communication, process, facilitation, exploration – are themes which he shares with other thinkers who are readily classified as postmodern. On the other hand, one would hardly call Rogers a radical relativist. His writing and practice were firmly grounded in values which were very important to him, and consistently maintained by him. His relativism, like Hiliman's, comes from a determination to honour all the oods, rather than from a despairing rejection of them all.

## **Person–Centred Pluralism**

When I first encountered the work of Rogers' in the late sixties, what most impressed me was his focus on relationship. As a teacher I suspected that my ability to teach my students effectively was somehow

related to the quality of my relationships with them. The Beatles were still singing "All you need is love". People in San Francisco were apparently wearing flowers in their hair. Dialogue and encounter were entering the vocabulary of many teachers. Rogers gave me a language to talk about this in a legitimately psychological manner, and to share my excitement with colleagues who were making the same discoveries.

Another notion which made a big impression on me was the notion of process. Reading Rogers confirmed me in my sense that what really mattered in teaching was the immediacy of what was happening. I accepted the obvious truth of his assertion that the content that children pick up in their schooling is far less important than the processes by which they pick it up, that what matters is that they learn to adapt creatively to the future, rather than learn to repeat the past.

I was also impressed by his insistence that power be shifted from teacher to student, his confidence that students are perfectly able to decide what was good for them. and his conviction that their teachers should respect this ability and desist from telling them what to learn and what to do. I enthusiastically embraced the notion of "facilitation". It became obvious to me that my prime function as a teacher was to develop and maintain an emotional and intellectual climate which was both nurturing and challenging, in which my students would be encouraged to initiate and take responsibility for their own learning. As a young teacher with counter-cultural tendencies, I saw education in terms of growth, freedom, dialogue, sharing, discovery, relationship, nurturance, creativity

The French analysts of the postmodern condition are inclined to date its beginning from 1968. Many people experienced a transformation of consciousness about that time (the moon landing, the Prague Spring, the TET offensive, the dawning of the Age of Aquarius). Reading *On Becoming a Person* was part of that transformation, as far as I was concerned.

When I now try to look at all this archetypally I find the language of relationship clearly pointing to the god Eros, the god of love and of the creativity which springs from relatedness. The language of growth, freedom and new beginnings points to Dionysos, the god of fertility, of impulse and spontaneity. The language of nurturance points to Demeter, the Mother. The language of process, dialogue and discovery points to Hermes. The language of power-sharing, cooperation and problem-solving points to Athena.

When I left the classroom in 1970 to do my PhD I found that there were other gods involved in client-centred therapy and student-centred teaching. I read what Rogers had to say about the organisation of personality in *Client-Centred Therapy*<sup>7</sup>, and his 1959 paper: *A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships*<sup>8</sup>. I noted his respectful acknowledgment of the perceptual theory of Snygg and Combs, and read *Individual Behaviour*<sup>9</sup> with great excitement. I came to understand behaviour as the rational response of the organism to the world as perceived. I became persuaded that the essence of therapy and education (from the client's and student's point of view) is the search for clarity, the

unending endeavour to construct a meaningful world out of one's experience. This is the work that the therapeutic conditions make possible. When my colleagues tried to trivialise the client-centred approach by locating it in a fantasy of touchy-feely countercultural cosiness and put scorn on the notion that empathic understanding is an essential component of effective teaching, I argued that empathy is essentially a cognitive operation, that it involves entering another's world in order to know how the other perceives and understands – not in order to share the other's feelings. I took both therapy and education to be concerned with an expansion of consciousness which enables greater freedom of action. This perspective on the person-centred approach was clearly that of Apollo, the sun god, the god of clarity and rationality, the god of understanding.

Working on my PhD in a School of Education which was at the time avowedly empirical in orientation, I was attempting to "operationalise" Rogerian therapeutic conditions, in order to develop testable hypotheses related to educational outcomes. When I came across Robert Carkhuff's *Healing and Human Relations*<sup>10</sup> which had been published in 1969, it was just what I needed. I was soon immersed in a self-consciously toughminded fantasy of levels of functioning, personal effectiveness, the development of human resources and, above all, of training and skilling. It is apparent to me now that Carkhuff's vision of highly effective people training less effective people in the skills of effective living belonged, as did his operationalism, his evangelical fervour and his focus on human resources, to the fantasy of Prometheus, the heroic liberator, the technologist.

The work of Carkhuff, Truax and their associates was taken up by Gerard Egan, and still has enormous impact in the field of counsellor training. However, I believe there has been a shift from Carkhuff's Promethean vision of interpersonal skilling as a way of emancipation to a notion of interpersonal skills as marketable commodities. This is, in part, a criticism of "Eganism", but the phenomenon is much more broadly based than that. I find that there are many people and organisations willing and able to pay me to teach them "interpersonal skills" and "negotiation skills", and I find empathy, positive regard and congruence being bought and sold by people whose language comes from Rogers but whose commitment to a person-centred philosophy is doubtful.

## **The Charm of Hermes**

This brings me back to Hermes, who I mentioned earlier as the god of exchange and, accordingly, of dialogue and process. He is, above all, the god of the marketplace. Hermes, the entrepreneur, has been peculiarly powerful in the last decades of the twentieth century, and it not surprising that his presence should be felt in the person-centred approach. I believe that Rogers' own thinking about counselling was largely dominated by a postmodern, Hermetic consciousness, and that this consciousness is manifested in the person-centred approach.

The very existence of the profession of counselling is an illustration of the postmodern condition as Lyotard describes it. Human interactions which used to be tied to the structures of society, to tribe, church, family and friendship, have entered the marketplace. Advice on how to live is bought and sold, as is emotional support, attention, listening, understanding, healing, even love. The increasing commercialisation of therapy, no less than the commercialisation of knowledge and the commercialisation of the arts, points to the contemporary Hermes inflation.

We know that Rogers had an enormous influence on establishing and legitimising the profession of counselling. We know that he did not go along with the popular psychoanalytic notion that the exchange of money is an enormously significant part of the therapeutic interaction. We know that he preferred to counsel without receiving money from his clients, and was able to avoid doing so. We know, further, that he succeeded in laicising both the theory and the profession. It is largely through his influence that counselling is no longer restricted to the medical profession, nor even to psychologists, and that it is possible now to argue that the qualities which make counselling effective are qualities which are reflected in every positive relationship. We should remember that Hermes is not only the god of the marketplace. He is the god of every crossroad and every boundary, every point where one person's pathway or territory meets another's, and that he dwells in these ordinary places rather than in a temple like the other gods.

Hermes is the facilitator, the god who makes things smooth and easy. I used to be enchanted with the word, when the notion of facilitation was an exciting and refreshing alternative to the dogmatism and oppression of the Senex. It has lost some of its enchantment, as I see the word and the notion embraced and abused by a postmodern culture of management. I am also a little more sensitive to my own Hermes-pathology than I used to be.

The client-centred counsellor does not set out to intervene in people's lives in order to change them. The initiation and direction of change come from the person who wants to change, not from the helper, who simply devotes his or her skills and attention to facilitating the exploration and insight which lead to change. There is, however, plenty of scope for self-deception in this. Hermes is, after all, the god of illusion and disguise. In my own counselling I am aware how easy it is for me to cross the gap between facilitating people's discovery of insights of their own and guiding them towards the discovery of insights which I have consciously or unconsciously prepared for them.

The person-centred ideal of a mode of counselling or teaching which withholds advice or instruction, in the conviction that client and student are themselves the experts in deciding on what is best for them in the present moment, remains revolutionary after fifty years of practice. It attracts a Hermes energy which can transform people's lives. Yet it is always threatened by a Hermes pathology. Hermes, the facile, the one who makes things easy, the smooth talker, the persuader, is equally present in facilitation at its best and manipulation at its worst.

When Rogers pointed out that the task of the therapist is not the expansion of the client's consciousness, but companionship on the client's journey, he was placing the approach within the image of Hermes, as distinct from that of Apollo. Hermes is the companion and protector of travellers. In the image of Hermes, the person-centred therapist accompanies the client on the client's sometimes frightening journey to the underworld.

This can only be done by people who are secure enough in themselves that they, know they will not get lost in the sometimes bizarre world of the other, and that they can comfortably return to their own world if they wish.<sup>11</sup>

We should note that companionship is different from facilitation. There are many therapists who will happily facilitate a client's Journey to his or her personal underworld, and there are many technologies available to do this. However, many of these, like travel agents, facilitate this journey for the client without going there themselves. It seems to me that the essence of Rogers' approach is that the therapist must go all the way into the client's underworld at the client's side and must be prepared, like the client, to stay there, that is, to be permanently changed by the experience.

Hermes as messenger of the gods and guide to the underworld is present in a very obvious way in the psychology of Carl Jung, for whom it is apparent that the gods dwell in our personal and collective unconscious. While client-centred therapy seems conventionally to ignore the notion of the unconscious, Rogers himself acknowledges the significance of unconscious processes in the therapeutic interaction, though he shuns anything approaching psychoanalytic language. Even in the phenomenological model proposed in his nineteen propositions in *Client-Centred Therapy* he acknowledges that when he talks about experience he is not limiting his discussion to conscious experience. In his discussion of empathy in *A Way of Being* he acknowledges that our experiencing moves ahead of our awareness, and sees the counsellor's task as tuning in to what is present but unconscious in the experiencing of the client, so as to assist the client to articulate it. "Empathy", he says,

involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever It is that he or she is experiencing .... it means sensing meanings of which he or she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover totally unconscious feelings, since this would be too threatening.<sup>12</sup>

It is not only in the client that felt meaning moves ahead of symbolisation. When the therapist tunes into the client's experiencing, it is her own organismic sensing of the interior state of the client which is the point from which the articulation of the client's meanings begins to emerge. It is Hermes, not Apollo, who provides the perspective which enables Rogers to claim that at his best his counselling was based on intuitively sensing the felt meanings of the client and even to note that this was sometimes associated with a trance-like state.

Another image in Hermes mythology is that of untying knots. It seems to me a fitting image of process in client-centred therapy. The client begins the process stuck, tied up, knotted and, in thoroughly experiencing and examining the knots finds a way to untie them, so as to continue on his or her way without this encumbrance. Hermes, who negotiates the release of Persephone from the Underworld and of Odysseus from Calypso's island, shares the title of "Loosener" with Dionysos, another god of transformation. But the patient work of the client-centred therapist is in contrast with Dionysian fantasy of liberation through catharsis and ecstasy.

Hermes, god of the postmodern condition, is obviously present in a therapy which focuses on dialogue rather than on training or emotional ventilation. Rogers comes back again and again to the notion that the essence of counselling is listening, that the message of the client is heard with intense attention and reflected back to the client. The therapist has no interest in conveying her own message. Instead, she attempts to state the client's message even more accurately and completely than the client. Hermes is the information-carrier, not the information-giver, and has no message of his own.

In Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition he points to the replacement of the "grand narratives" by "local narratives". The gradual abandonment of the great missionary and universalising dogmatic systems is echoed in a postmodern science by the disappearance of an absolute material object about which one can make "truthful" statements. The Apollonine myth of an absolute reality which can be made manifest to the human intellect is fading, and is being replaced by a much more flexible, relativistic and ambiguous approach to reality – an approach which is in the image of Hermes rather than Apollo. Rogers' thinking is in tune with this shift in consciousness.

I think that men and women, individually and collectively, are inwardly and organismically rejecting the view of one single and culture-approved reality. I believe that they are moving inevitably towards the acceptance of millions of separate, challenging, exciting, informative, individual perceptions of reality.<sup>13</sup>

This statement comes from *A Way of Being* (1980), but this thinking is in the client-centred approach from the beginning. The approach operates on the understanding that, as far as the client's behaviour is concerned, the only truth which is functional is the subjective truth of the client. The therapist must abandon any illusion that he or she knows more about the truth of the client's world than the client does, and take the client's truth seriously, whether that truth comes from Zeus, Hera, Aphrodite or Dionysos. Hermes acknowledges all the gods and supports their worship. Empathy and unconditional regard are both necessary here. For Rogers it remained "a basic fact of all human life that we live in separate realities"<sup>14</sup>. Without getting into a postmodern circularity with regard to the relativity of even this "basic fact", we can assert that even client-centred therapists live in separate realities, and we should not be surprised that any push to establish an orthodoxy of belief and practice in the person-centred approach is likely to have trouble dealing with the inevitable paradox.

Indeed it appears to me that some, at least, of the strength of the person-centred approach comes from its multidimensionality and its ability to contain logical contradictions without splitting apart. In the language of archetypal psychology, the approach is polytheistic rather than monotheistic.

## **A Polytheistic Therapy**

On the one hand, the Hermes archetype gives the person-centred approach its energy and defines its vision of the good life:

For the client, this optimal therapy would mean an exploration of increasingly strange and unknown and dangerous feelings in himself...

The Good life is a process, not a state of being.

It is a direction, not a destination.

If a person could be fully open to his experience, however, every stimulus ... would be freely relayed through the nervous system without being distorted by any defence mechanism.

the individual is becoming more able to listen to himself, to experience what is going on within himself.

Such living in the moment means an absence of rigidity, of tight organisation, of the imposition of structure on experience. It means instead a maximum of adaptability, of structure in experience, a flowing, changing organisation of self and personality.

Yet the deeply exciting thing about human beings is that when the individual is inwardly free, he chooses as the good life this process of becoming.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand the other gods are fully acknowledged. The gods quarrel constantly, but Hermes remains on friendly terms with them all.

Most therapies are monotheistic. They acknowledge only one truth, one value system, one version of reality, and frame both their successes and their failures in terms of this reality. Client-centred therapy is not like this, although we sometimes try to make it so by defining too single-mindedly what we take to be the truth. Neither is it mindlessly eclectic or shapelessly flexible. It has a distinctive truth and a distinctive form, but both its truth and its form are comfortable with paradox.

To expand on this notion I'll continue to use the metaphors of archetypal psychology and speak of the presence of the gods, though clearly the notion could be developed in quite other ways.

Carl Rogers' thought first became widely known in the context of a counter-culture dominated by the archetypes of Eros and Dionysos. This gave his ideas plenty of exposure, but it also distorted them with the pathology of Eros and Dionysos, so that in the minds of many (apologists as well as critics) a person-centred approach seems to involve mindlessly indiscriminate intimacy, an absolute priority of feeling over thought, narcissistic self-indulgence, total absence of social awareness, general permissiveness. and romantic soft-headedness.

This is not the person-centred approach and it is not the positive manifestation of Eros and Dionysos.

In our thinking and behaviour, the young gods seem to stick together, so it is not surprising to find Eros and Dionysos associated with Hermes in the person-centred approach. We can, if we like, make a case that client-centred therapy is essentially an Eros therapy, that the understanding and practice of genuine loving is the core of its theory and method. We can theorise that what confused or suffering clients need more than anything else in the world is the experience of a relationship in which another person genuinely cares for them and desires what is good for them, and we can theorise (and experience) that this in itself is healing. Or we can make a case that client-centred therapy is a Dionysos-charged therapy, that its essential theoretical notion is the existence of the actualising tendency, the drive towards growth, towards emergence of the true, vital, free, spontaneous self from the sterility of introjected values and incongruent behaviour, and that its essential practice is the provision of the conditions which will best support this growth.

On the other hand, we might argue that client-centred therapy is essentially an Athena-therapy, that its key assumption is the existence of the client's practical wisdom, his or her innate (though often repressed) ability to decide what is best, and that its key practice is the genuine sharing of power between therapist and client. in a purposeful and cooperative exploration and resolution of a problem. Athena is goddess of democracy, and it may be argued that client-centred therapy is as much an artifact of Rogers' political convictions as of his psychological ones.

We might argue, again, that client-centred therapy is essentially the work of Hephaistos, that it has taken the commonplace elements of human relating and shown us how to craft them, to make them beautiful and powerful. We can demonstrate that, for both client and therapist, therapy is focused, dedicated and patient work. The client-centred therapist often resembles Hephaistos, who works away at the forge below the mountain, aware (perhaps resentfully) that other gods are attracting a lot of attention by doing brilliant and exciting things, but determined to stick at his unglamorous craft, for this is where beauty is created.

Or we might follow Carkhuff in proclaiming the truth of Prometheus, and see the therapeutic conditions as the skills of highly effective people, engaged in liberating and empowering their clients or students, who will thus, in their turn, become effective, productive, resourceful people and make an impact on the world. Or we might simply reiterate that client-centred therapy is not a way of life but a technique, that we should not be distracted by vague, soft-headed talk about person-centredness, but concentrate on perfecting our technique, for it is a powerful instrument for setting people free.

The truth of Hestia is very different. From the perspective of Hestia client-centred therapy is inner work, a turning away from frantic or desperate action to find the still point within, where thinking and feeling are one and confusion dissolves. The centre of Hestia's worship in the classical world was the hearth (*focus*, in Latin), around which the family constantly rediscovers and reaffirms its unity. The

person-centred counsellor's attention to the immediacy and mutuality of the present moment of relationship points to Hestia, as does the centrality of focus in the language of experiential focusing.

We might argue, on the other hand, that this is the work of Aphrodite, that it is based on a confidence in the essential beauty of human beings, that it works through the practice of transparency and authenticity, of the beauty of what is simply and concretely and congruently there, in both therapist and client. We can certainly argue that, where many therapies operate within a fantasy that the liking of client for therapist or therapist for client is irrelevant, this is not the case in client-centred counselling or healing, or in student-centred education. The seductive presence of Aphrodite is central to the process, and for most people working in a person-centred framework it is inconceivable that it could be otherwise.

We can even claim a major place for Ares, for client-centred therapy is essentially about confrontation, about facing oneself and one's world as they are without pretence or avoidance. One distorted perception of the person-centred approach is that it is cosy and unchallenging. Any therapist who uses the approach with skill and commitment and any client who has the good fortune to interact with such a therapist knows that this is not true. The client-centred process demands courage and energy, a readiness to confront the frightening, to wrestle with demons and dragons if need be, to assert oneself, to be heroic. And this can be just as true for the therapist as it is for the client. We can argue that this perspective is absolutely central to the person-centred approach, that the truth of client-centred therapy is the truth of Ares, or of his protege, the hero Herakles. We can argue that the process of client-centred therapy is the struggle of a "self" trying to emerge from a tangle of introjected values and borrowed identifications and behaviours, and that this struggle deserves to be called heroic.

On the other hand we can as legitimately argue that the truth of client-centred therapy is the very different truth of Demeter, the Great Mother, that its effectiveness comes through the therapist's ability to offer support and nourishment. Very often what the client needs most is the security, the unconditional love, the emotional sustenance, the protection, which belong the Mother archetype, and which many therapies, unlike client-centred counselling, actually deny. Client-centred counselling has the means to provide the mother's warm embrace to the client whose immediate need to be is childlike and dependent., and has the means also to assist that client to grow towards independence and self-reliance.

Then again, we might argue just as legitimately that client-centred therapy is the province of Artemis, the nature goddess who does not give birth herself but presides over childbirth and protects the fragile infant. The metaphor of Artemis, the midwife, is one which Rogers himself uses. It carries a lot of meaning for a therapist who sits beside someone in whom a new life is struggling to be born. So does the metaphor of Artemis the Nature goddess, who cherishes and protects and affirms what is natural

and what is feminine, and upholds the values of the natural and the feminine against a pathological patriarchy which would exploit or destroy them.

I think there is a great deal in Carl Rogers' later writing which reflects the perspective of Artemis. His early writings, on the other hand, are dominated by the perspective of Artemis' brother, Apollo. Apollo is manifested in a perceptual theory which asserts that human behaviour is a rational response to the world as it is perceived, and in the value placed on scientific research as a means of reaching understanding of the process and impact of therapy. The Apollonine perspective has endured in the person-centred approach, both in a research tradition and in the Apollonine truth that it is the task of the therapist to assist the client to understand, to clarify, to symbolise, to find meaning in his or her world. We might argue that client-centred therapy is essentially an Apollo therapy, in that it acknowledges that we are driven to construct or discover a meaning, for our lives, that our behaviour is consistent with the meaning we construct or discover, that the therapist's task is through empathy to assist the client's attempt to understand and symbolise and articulate such meanings.

The person-centred approach is sometimes attacked for its perceived focus on the Individual and its neglect of the social dimensions of life. Rogerian thinking, and humanistic psychology generally, is accused of being a manifestation of a culture of narcissism. Nevertheless, we can argue that Hera, Queen of the gods, the goddess who attends to the stability of the family and other social structures, is very much a part of it. She certainly appears to have been powerful in Rogers' own personality. She appears in his theory in his understanding that the actualising tendency takes us towards greater interdependence with others, that as the client in therapy becomes more congruent and self-affirming, he or she becomes more accepting of others, more socially aware, and more socialised. She appears in client-centred therapy in the modelling of a role-defined relationship driven by the therapist's conviction that people matter, and in the therapist's loyalty and commitment to her clients. Hera appears also in client-centred therapy's acknowledgment of every client's essential dignity, an acknowledgment which not every form of therapy is prepared to make.

Where does the old man, Zeus, come into all of this. Non-directive therapy, Rogers' early formulation of the approach, was by name and nature an attack on the assumptions of the patriarchy, and the person-centred approach has preserved this stance. I think that Rogers had a blind spot with regard to Zeus. He sees authority as essentially abusive. When he writes about education he uses "traditional" as a pejorative term. In the Rogers-Buber dialogue he appears unable to acknowledge what to Buber is obvious – that there is a genuine power differential between therapist and client. It seems to me that, to use Jung's language, issues of power and authority are strongly constellated in the "shadow" of the person-centred approach. One manifestation of this shadow might be our ability, individually and collectively, to deny any interest in power while unconsciously behaving in ways which enable us to dominate clients or colleagues. I

believe another manifestation is the tendency (which I am demonstrating here) to turn Carl Rogers into the Wise Old Man and his writings into sacred texts. I suggest that the Senex will not be denied, even in a philosophical position dedicated to overthrowing him.

It seems a very commonplace observation that we can use a range of such metaphors to give a sense of the person-centred approach, that we can find a number of very different "truths" about the nature of therapy, all of which seem central to the client-centred approach. However, it ceases to be a commonplace observation when we try to apply the same approach to other therapies. For many of them it simply cannot be done. They operate on the basis of a single truth and are blind to all other perspectives. Try to find all the gods debating within behaviour modification, primal therapy, rational-emotive therapy, psychoanalysis, neuro-linguistic programming, hypnosis, electro-convulsive therapy. You will be lucky to hear more than one voice. They are monotheistic therapies, existing in a fantasy of a single way of knowing. I suggest that the ambiguity and paradox that we learn to live with in the person-centred approach is peculiar to that approach, and that this is so because the person-centred approach draws its energy and derives its vision from the archetype of Hermes.

If we limit our worship to a single god we find ourselves enmeshed in that god's pathology. Hermes is a more complex personality than most, and his pathology, takes many forms. We might mention groundlessness, irresponsibility, absence of an ethical sense, grandiosity, seduction, the need to be constantly on the move, deception, manipulation, opportunism, the lack of interest in work and productivity, the unwillingness to stand up for anything, the obsessive eagerness to sell or barter, the tendency to see market value as the only criterion of quality. I suggest that there is a lot of Hermes pathology around in the culture of late capitalism, though I am aware that in making such a suggestion I am speaking from the perspective of Zeus, Hera and Apollo, to whom such things matter. If we have no god but Hermes, we are likely to harbour a clutch of such pathologies in our personalities and therapies. On the other hand, if we neglect to give Hermes the acknowledgment due to him, we will miss out on the flexibility, playfulness, grace, intuition, imagination, curiosity, magic, poetry and sense of the sacred which are peculiarly his. I suggest that the value of the person-centred approach lies largely in its ability to make just this acknowledgement to Hermes

*dispenser of favours, guide, giver of good things.*<sup>16</sup>

An archetypal analysis such as I have been attempting itself represents a postmodern way of thinking or, if you prefer, a Hermes consciousness. From this perspective it must be clear that my basic intention is to explore an image, not to propound a truth. For me the image is a rich one, and its exploration gives me a means to deal with my own felt meaning of the person-centred approach, which I am not at present able to set out with proper Apollonine rationality. The myth which shows us Zeus

sending the two squabbling brothers, Apollo and Hermes, off together to seek the cattle of the egds, reminds us that there are two complementary ways of approaching reality, and that they don't negotiate an agreement and become friends until the end of the journey.

---

<sup>1</sup> See James Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology*, Spring Publications, 1983

<sup>2</sup> Charles Boer (trans), *The Homeric Hymns*, Spring Publications, 1970, p. 18-58

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* p. 58

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester University Press, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978. p. 292

<sup>6</sup> Kark Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, cited in G.Gill, "Post-structuralism as Ideology", *Arena*, 69, 1984, p 60–96.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Rogers, *Client-Centred Therapy: Its current practice, implications and theory*, Houghton Mifflin, 1951.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Rogers, 'A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships developed in the client-centred framework', in S. Koch (ed), *Psychology: A study of a science*, McGraw Hill, 1959, pp. 184–256.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Snygg and Arthur Combs, *Individual Behaviour*, New York: Harper and Row, 1959.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Carkhuf, *Helping and Human Relations*, Longmans, 1969

<sup>11</sup> *Client-Centred Therapy*, p.483

<sup>12</sup> Rogers. *A Way Of Being*, Houghton Mifflin, 1980 p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> *A Way of Being*, p.106.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* p. 107

<sup>15</sup> Rogers, "A Therapist's view of the good life: the fully functioning person", in *The Carl Rogers Reader*, Constable, 1989, p. 409–420, passim.

<sup>16</sup> *Homeric Hymns*, p 59.