

THE CLIENT-CENTRED ECOPSYCHOLOGIST

Bernie Neville

La Trobe University

What happens to psychotherapy when we abandon the egocentric and anthropomorphic assumptions in which it is ordinarily grounded? Ecopsychology demands that we expand out notions of self not only to the species but also to the whole of non-human reality.

Client-centered theory and therapy concerns itself with the world as constructed and experienced by the client. It is based on a number of premises: that client and therapist are essentially distinct entities, with their separate personal boundaries; that it is the client's subjective experience of the world which shapes the client's behaviour; that the success of therapy hinges on the therapist's ability to enter and articulate the phenomenal world of the client. On the other hand it assumes that the client's subjective experience reflects well or poorly a world of real objects in which the client lives, a world which can't be changed by simply thinking about it differently. Both client and therapist act in and on a world which is essentially "other". The focus of therapy is the quality of the individual's functioning and experience of life. In ideology and method it privileges subjectivity and personal autonomy.

Ecopsychology, which has its roots in deep ecology - a perspective first developed by the Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess - challenges the anthropocentric assumptions on which most therapies, including client-centered therapy, are based.¹ It abandons any essentialist notion of a boundary between self and the world. It does not perceive the world as "other". In such a perspective, adequate human functioning demands a congruence not just between one's behaviour and one's self-concept, or between one's self-concept and one's "real self", but a congruence between self and Nature. It demands an expansion of the notions of "self" and "self-realisation" not only to the species but to the whole of nonhuman reality. If subjective, individualised experience is acknowledged and valued, it is acknowledged and valued as a manifestation of the "mind of the world". The focus of therapy shifts from the individual to the planet. In its most radical expressions, the uniqueness of the individual is illusory, or at most irrelevant.

I believe there is a point in forcing a meeting between these two perspectives.

IMAGINING THERAPY

Ecopsychology and client-centred therapy are grounded in two different ways of imagining the world, two different fantasies.

The first of these fantasies is the fantasy of the many. It is the fantasy at the root of most of the psychological models of human life. In this fantasy, the universe consists of many entities which, though they may have connections with each other, are essentially separate. Human beings are essentially individuals, existing in a world of differentiated objects. The centre of experience is the individual ego. Human beings exist as separate, encapsulated egos which communicate by passing information across the spaces between them. For those whose work as therapist is embedded in this fantasy, it is the individual who is healed, or adjusted, or stimulated to grow, or allowed to emerge, or who continues the journey. I'll call this the Hero (Prometheus) fantasy.

The second of these fantasies is the fantasy of the oneness of all things. In this fantasy, human beings are not terribly important. We are part of a larger system, which will continue to live and renew itself when human beings wipe themselves out. The given universe does not exist for human beings, for all our arrogant assumption that there is something special

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about us. The universe exists, and we are a not-terribly-significant part of it. Or, more poetically, the earth is our mother and we live in symbiotic union with her. Those who work within this fantasy are concerned with the health of the earth, not of the individual. I'll call this the Mother (Gaia) fantasy.

I use the word fantasy here because I am not concerned here with the facts of our situation, not concerned with what is "objectively true" about it, but with the ways we imagine it. I use the word fantasy where I could perhaps talk about narratives or discourses or even paradigms, because it carries the sense of a world experienced imaginally. I am interested in the stories we tell ourselves, particularly the "big stories", the myths and fairy tales which are worked over and modified and passed down in every culture as representations of our experience of the world and our attempts to make sense of it. Jungians are inclined to the view that the tendency to imagine or construct the world in certain ways is hard-wired in our physiology. Whether or not we accept this notion, it seems that the myths of the great classical cultures still reflect our psychological experience of the world.

The Hero fantasy is one story of how the world is. The Mother fantasy is another. I suggest they are both "true" stories.

Archetypal psychology, which finds its inspiration in the work of Carl Jung and James Hillman, tries to see through human experience to the "old stories" through which human life constantly plays itself out. Human experience appears to be not random but patterned, and the patterns apparent in post-industrial society appear to be essentially the same patterns as recorded in humanity's oldest stories. Whether "hard-wired" or not, these key patterns are apparent in our ways of imagining human personality and in our ways of imagining therapy.

In the "old stories" of Greek mythology, which both reflect and shape the ways people embedded in Western culture think about themselves, the Mother and the Hero are often in conflict.

The Hero story has been dominant in Western consciousness, in one form or another, for nearly three thousand years. Nevertheless, the Mother story has survived Greece and Rome and Christianity, sometimes, as in the German romanticism, with a strong public voice, sometimes slipping into the collective forgetfulness. When the more poetic of the deep ecologists talk about Gaia and our organic union with her it is obvious that they are repeating the Mother story. When ecologists talk systems-talk about the interdependence of all things, or decry our anthropocentric assumptions about the planet, it is the same story in a different language.

THE PROMETHEAN FANTASY

The Hero story has many variations in Greek mythology. We have, for instance, the Apollo version, where the hero destroys the earth dragon, imposes order on chaos and brings the clear light of reason to the world. Or the Herakles version where the superhero completes a succession of impossible tasks, moving rivers and mountains and helping people along the way. Or the Achilles version where the youthful hero chooses to die a brilliant death rather than live an uneventful life. For the couple of centuries of the industrial age we've been following the script of the Prometheus version.

Prometheus is the scientist and technician, the hero who liberated human beings from the power of the gods, who stole the gods' fire to bring light and warmth to humanity, who taught men how to take control of their worlds by technology, who refused to allow women a

place in the scheme of things, who set out to improve the lot of humanity and was punished for it by Zeus. The scientific culture of the modern era has worked itself out within the Promethean fantasy of individuality, autonomy, control of nature, rationality, progress, liberation, and salvation through technology (or technique), in spite of the evidence that science and technology do not inevitably make people freer and happier. It is only now, when it is becoming apparent that the Promethean project of "improving" the world is faltering, that there is serious challenge to the Promethean version of truth. And one form this challenge takes is the return of the Mother story - in science, in the environmental movement, in nature mysticism and in some forms of feminism.

Counselling psychology, whether seen as a science or an art or a craft, has from the beginning been framed by the Hero myth. We can find the Promethean project in developmental psychology, in psychiatry, behaviourism, psychoanalysis, ego-psychology, rational-emotive therapy, gestalt and practically anywhere else we care to look. And we find it also in client-centered therapy.

Client-centred therapists are not as deeply embedded in the Hero narrative as practitioners of some other therapies. Nevertheless many of their core assumptions are Promethean. They make the assumption that both therapist and client live in a world which is essentially distinct from them, a world which must be dealt with as "other". Individuals act in and on this world as separate and distinct identities. They may be linked by empathy and relationship, but their separateness is not challenged. Though the key metaphor in client-centred therapy is a vegetative one (growth) belonging to Gaia rather than a mechanical one (efficiency) which belongs to Prometheus, it is the client-as-individual who must emerge, grow, mature. The therapist acts so as to liberate the client from the power of impulse and compulsion, from conditions of worth, from a poor self-concept, from inappropriate self-talk, from dependence on the therapist, or whatever. The therapist supports the client on a hero's journey, past beasts and barriers, out of darkness into light, from powerlessness to empowerment. All good hero-stuff.

The centre of this psychological world is the heroic ego, as Freud asserted so confidently:

Normally there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego. The ego appears as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else. (1961, p.14)

For Freud it was obvious enough that the differentiation of self from environment was a necessary and significant achievement for the species and for each individual infant.

One comes to learn a procedure by which, by deliberate direction of one's sensory activities....one can differentiate between what is internal - what belongs to the ego - and what is external - what emanates from the outer world. In this way one takes the first step towards the introduction of the reality principle which is to dominate future development. (ibid p. 14)

No more "participation mystique" with mother or nature. No more infantile sense of undifferentiated oneness with the world. The self stops at the skin. We are on our own in an alien world of objects. The clearer the boundary we build between self and other, the more heroic the ego, the less miserable we will be.

The problem with this, which is only gradually being recognised, is that when we look at the bigger picture, it seems as though it is our collective domination by the Hero narrative which is responsible for the plight of the planet. Prometheus' promise of emancipation from the power of the gods, his gift of the science and cunning and technology to control the material

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world, his vision of "progress", has brought us to a crisis where the process of our extinction may be already irreversible. We no longer assume as a matter of course that science and technology will inevitably produce a better world. From this perspective our focus on the Hero narrative may appear not just problematic but pathological.

And just as we find the Promethean orthodoxy of the control of nature under challenge from the deep ecologists and others, we find the orthodoxy of ego-development challenged in psychology. In Jung-oriented thinkers particularly, but increasingly elsewhere, we find the phenomenon of identification with a single definable ego being construed as dysfunctional. James Hillman is by no means alone in referring to the "ego-pathology" of our "normal" ways of being in the world.

Carl Rogers' psychology and therapy were not enmeshed in a fantasy of control, and he did not identify the person with the rational ego any more than Jung did. From the first he preferred the Gaian language of biology [the organism, growth] to the Promethean language of mechanics [energy, structure] in discussing the what and how of personal development. He acknowledges the influence of Rank's "relationship therapy" on his early thinking and practice.² However, there has been, and remains, a stream of thinking in client-centered therapy which can well be called Promethean.

Rogers' early empiricism contributed to this, as did his early ambition to develop a technique that was better than other techniques. His theory of personality and behaviour as developed in *Client-Centered Therapy* (1951), and developed further in his paper "A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework" (1959), is radical in the context of the positivistic assumptions which have framed American academic psychology for most of this century. Nevertheless, we can now see in this systematic exposition of his theory of personality some reflections of the same Cartesian and positivist biases as the behaviourist theory he found so unsatisfactory. It is mechanistic and materialistic, which is exactly how a "proper" scientific theory is supposed to be. Rogers systematically explores cause and effect within the boundaries of sensate knowledge and modernist logic. It is clear from Rogers' later writing that by the time he produced *A Way of Being* (1980), this sort of thinking had lost its attraction for him. Nevertheless, it has remained an important thread in the theory and practice associated with client-centered therapy.

This thinking has found its most Promethean expression in the models of Carkhuff (1969), Truax (1967) and Egan (1980) who operationalised and quantified the core conditions to make a technical science out of client-centered therapy. Carkhuff's writing is manifestly hero-literature. Not only is he in a fantasy of intellectual control over the messy field of human communication and human personality change, but he has assumed technical control over input and outcome and over the process of bringing people to "higher functioning" and enabling them through their increased "effectiveness" to take responsibility for social and political change. He focuses on the impact which the behaviour of one individual (the helper) has on the behaviour of another individual (the helpee) and on finding a measurable relationship between cause and effect. There is a vast difference between this way of writing about client-centered therapy and Carl Rogers' own writing, even when he was at his most empirical, and it is certainly in contrast to his later writing about the person-centered approach. Yet the technique-centered, skills-based practice typified by Carkhuff and Egan still represents a certain type of orthodoxy in the field. And so it should. There are many useful ways of thinking about therapy, and this is one of them. The Hero story is just as true as the Mother story. However, each story only represents a partial truth.

It is not my purpose here to expand on the ways in which client-centered therapy, through its focus on subjective experience, individuality, choice and personal power reflects the images of the Hero fantasy. What I am concerned with here is an attempt to explore another truth, albeit another partial truth, about client-centred therapy. I want to examine what client-centered therapy looks like when it is framed within the Mother fantasy.

PAYING ATTENTION TO GAIA

Stephen Aizenstadt puts the question: "What would a psychology look like if it is based on an ecocentric worldview rather than an egocentric one?" (1995, p.98). He suggests that we might, for instance view depression as a natural response to the manic condition of the world. We might see the condition of the world being projected in the behaviour of human beings, rather than human beings projecting their pathology onto the world. We might listen to the voices of the earth and take them seriously. We might give up the notion that psychological health is solely a function of individual wholeness and nurturing human relationships, and imagine rather that that both physiological and psychological illness is connected to our damaged relationship to nature.

Once we are resituated in this wider, ever-transforming ecology of nature, we reconnect with the natural resources and the rhythms that live inside of us. (ibid p.99)

Aizenstadt is clearly writing within the Mother fantasy. Or take Theodore Rozzak's essentially Jungian argument that we are deeply implicated in nature, that the integration and emergence of the whole self, conscious and unconscious – a process which Jung called individuation – is simply harmonising oneself with the natural world. Ecopsychology, as he understands it,

holds that there is a greater ecological intelligence as deeply rooted in the foundations of the psyche as the sexual and aggressive instincts Freud found there. Or rather...the psyche is rooted **inside** a greater intelligence once known as the **anima mundi**, the psyche of the Earth herself that has been nurturing life in the cosmos for billions of years through its drama of increasing complexification. The "greening of psychology" begins with matters as familiar to all of us as the empathic rapport with the natural world which is reborn in every child and which survives in the work of nature poets and landscape painters. Where this sense of shared identity is experienced as we most often experience it, person to person, we call it "love". (1995, p.16)

Definitely mother-stuff.

Whether Gaia is for us a goddess, an organism animated by soul, or a biocybernetic universal system, we are in the Mother story when we shift our focus of significance from ego to eco.

On first reflection, there doesn't appear to be much connection between the subjectivist and individualist worldview of client-centered therapy, and the great web of life, concrete and material and infinitely complex. There are plenty of people to argue that the care of the worried well and even the mentally suffering is an indulgence and an irrelevance in the current ecological emergency. Our efforts should be spent on saving the planet. After that we can worry about whether we are happy or not. Our conventional response is that saving the planet starts with the consciousness of each individual. We can, we argue, give our attention to the individual without necessarily privileging the individual over the world. However, the person-centered approach has more to say about it than that.

BOUNDARIES OF THE SELF

Ken Wilber (1996) deals with the individual versus planet problem, the Hero versus Mother conflict, by calling on Arthur Koestler's word "holon", by which he means something which is both a part and a whole. An atom is an entity in itself; it also exists as a part of a molecule.

A molecule exists as an entity in itself; it also exists as part of a cell. And so on all the way up the "holarchy". We seem to have no problem with applying this notion to everything smaller than us in the "holarchy", and even to everything larger than us, but we have some resistance to applying it to ourselves. We like to see ourselves as top of the heap, rather than as cells of a larger organism.

One reason why the writings of Carl Jung have some appeal for psychologically-oriented ecologists and ecologically-oriented psychologists is that his therapy of the individual was grounded in a notion that our individuality is a secondary phenomenon. For Jung we are momentary manifestations of a greater reality. Rogers, by contrast, perceived individuality as the primary phenomenon. For him, each of us exists separately in a world of experience on which we act and which acts upon us. For client-centered therapists working within the framework of Rogers' theory of personality it is the subjectivity of this individual existence which is the focus. They deal with the world as object, as experienced by the client-subject, rather than dealing with the self-client relationship as an expression of the world-subject.

In his (1951) exposition of a theory of personality and personal behaviour, Rogers makes the point that he is not fully satisfied with current explanations, including his own, of how a portion of a child's experiential world gradually becomes differentiated as the self. He points out that the self is not necessarily coexistent with the physical organism. Following Angyal, he argues that "there is no possibility of a sharp line between organism and environment, and that there is likewise no sharp limit between the experience of the self and of the outside world" (p. 497). His way of dealing with this question in 1951 was to call on the Promethean image of control: "Those elements which we control are regarded as part of self" (ibid). Indeed they are, as long as we are embedded in the Hero story. However, from the tentativeness of his language we might conclude that Rogers was, even at this date, reserving his decision on where the self ends and entertaining the notion, which Bateson and other systems cyberneticians have strongly argued since, that any boundaries we set to the "self" are arbitrary.

For a deep ecologist like Warwick Fox (1990), the "self" is identified with "all that is", in a "deep realisation that we and all other entities are aspects of a single unfolding reality" (p. 252). He is careful to point out that this realisation does not imply that all multiplicity and diversity is reduced to homogeneous mush, but rather "the fact that we and all other entities are aspects of a single unfolding reality means neither that all entities are fundamentally the same nor that they are absolutely autonomous, but rather simply that they are *relatively* autonomous" (ibid). Such ideas can sit comfortably enough with a client-centred framework, and we can argue that in the healing relationship of one-to-one therapy we are engaged in the healing of the planet just as deeply as those whose concern for the planet leads them into social and political activism.

Once we relativise the atomistic individualism which has characterised conventional modernist understandings of therapy, client-centered practice takes on an extra dimension. We find, for instance, that Carl Rogers' proposition that a condition of successful therapy is that the client must be anxious or at least vulnerable to anxiety, has implications outside the domestic problems of the client. At one level we have personal anxieties; at a second level we have collective anxieties - family, workplace, profession, society, nation, culture; at a

third level we have species anxiety. At a fourth level we have a suffering planet, which is itself an element in a larger system.³ I sense that client-centred therapists and other practitioners of the person-centered approach have shown an increasing awareness of the second of these levels. It appears in the work of those whose client-centered practice is influenced by systems thinking. It appears in suggestions that, when practising our craft in a multicultural society our empathy must extend not only to the client but to the client's culture. It has found a further expression in the cross-cultural forums initiated by Rogers. However, it is not the second level which interests me here, but the third and fourth

It seems to me a given that we are currently experiencing a massive collective anxiety about the incomprehensible danger we are in. We repress this anxiety both personally and collectively, but it manifests itself in collective pathological behaviour. It seems to me that it is the essential work of therapy to challenge the lies we tell ourselves, not just the personal ones but the shared ones. The counsellor who attends fully to the client-as-holon will be listening not only to the private pain but also to the pain of the species and the plight of the world. The unconditional caring which comes with this attention will go "all the way down" the holarchy (and all the way up). James Hillman comments on his experience as therapist attending to the pathology of the world:

I find today that patients are more sensitive than the worlds they live in.....I mean that the distortions of communication, the sense of harassment and alienation, the deprivation of intimacy with the immediate environment, the feelings of false values and inner worthlessness experienced relentlessly in the world of our common habitation are genuine realistic appraisals and not merely apperception's of our intra-subjective selves. My practice tells me that I can no longer distinguish clearly between neuroses of self and neuroses of world. (1982, p.72)

SELF-REALISATION AND THE FORMATIVE TENDENCY

One of the key concepts in deep ecology is self-realisation, a concept Naess borrowed from Spinoza. It is a loose translation of Spinoza's term *conatus*, by which he meant the basic motivation which can be considered the essence of all things, ie. the tendency to persist in their own being. For people working in the client-centred framework, such a notion resonates strongly with Rogers' statement that "the organism has one basic tendency and striving - to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism" (1951, p. 487). However, it is absolutely central to Spinoza's understanding that this self-realisation is realisation of the whole, since there is only one substance, of which we are, individually and collectively, specific expressions. For Spinoza our self-realisation is not the realisation of a separate autonomous self, but of a more and more expansive and non-egoic sense of self, a self which is to be identified with "all there is".

When Rogers expands on his notion of an actualising tendency, a tendency to become "that self which one truly is" (1961, p.181), he originally does so within the Hero-narrative, asserting that the organism "moves in the direction of greater independence or self-responsibility [and]...in the direction of an increasing self-government, self-regulation, and autonomy, and away from heteronomous control, or control by external forces" (1951, p.488) However, he adds that "the self-actualization of the organism appears to be in the direction of socialisation" (ibid. p.488). That is to say, increasing autonomy and independence do not imply separateness and alienation, but rather increasing interest in, empathy with and compassion for others. For Naess, on the other hand, it is the expansion of the sense of self (and abandonment of a sense of being autonomous) which brings a deeper and broader identification with and, consequently, compassion for others.

Van Belle (1990) argues very convincingly that it was the centrality of the growth image in Rogers' formulation of client-centered therapy which led him towards his later "mystical" thinking, which led him to propose that growth is something that happens to people rather than something they do, that growth is a universal process in which people exist, that growth shapes the individual rather than that the individual determines or controls the nature of growth. For Van Belle, given Rogers' adherence to this notion of growth, there is an inevitability in Rogers' movement over time from his early formulations of theory and methodology to what he terms "mystical universalism". By the time he wrote *A Way of Being* (1980) Rogers had, through his experience in encounter groups, developed a transpersonal notion of growth and communication and he describes his experiences in phrases like "participating in a larger universal formative tendency" (p.128) and "an awareness of together being part of a broader universal consciousness" (p. 197). He suggests that there might be a non-anthropocentric base for theorising the person-centered approach:

I hypothesise that there is a formative directional tendency in the universe..... This is an evolutionary tendency towards greater order, greater complexity, greater interrelatedness. In humankind, this tendency exhibits itself as the individual moves from a single-cell origin to complex organic functioning, to knowing and sensing below the level of consciousness, to a conscious awareness of the organism and the external world, to a transcendent awareness of the harmony and unity of the cosmic system, including humankind. (p.133)

For many client-centered theorists and therapists, including Van Belle, this shift from a focus on individual subjectivity to a focus on cosmic consciousness was not a particularly welcome development in Rogers' thinking. Client-centered theorists and therapists have tended to stay with Rogers' earlier formulations. These provide a framework, a purpose and a methodology which enable effective one-to-one therapy to be undertaken. "Mystical universalism" seems more problematic in this respect. However, I believe that our approach to the task (a Hero image) will be richer and more fruitful (a Mother image) if we appreciate that in these early formulations there is already a tension between the two narratives, and if we take seriously Rogers' suggestion that the formative tendency is not an individual - nor even a specifically human - phenomenon, but something which characterises both human and nonhuman existence.

It should be noted that Rogers justifies his fairly tentative statements of cosmic identification by starting from his experience of identification with one, ten, a hundred or a thousand individuals and expanding it to embrace the universe. For a deep ecologist like Fox, this is misguided. This sort of personally based identification, starting with the people who are closest to us (partner, family, tribe, species) and spreading outwards is as likely to lead to the oppression, exploitation and destruction of those parts of the human and nonhuman world which we do not include in the *us* as it is likely to bring us to greater harmony with them. From the ecologist's point of view we ought to start at the other end – we should identify first of all with a universe which contains all entities impartially, and through this identification bring an attitude of "steadfast friendliness" to each being we encounter, for "cosmologically based identification means having a lived sense of commonality with all other entities (whether one happens to encounter them personally or not)" (1990, p. 257).⁴

Rogers from the first preferred to imagine personality as process rather than as structure, and not simply as individualistic process. He came to see client and therapist as together caught up in a process of becoming which includes everything in the universe. The drive to maintain and enhance the experiencing organism is not something in the client or something in the client-therapist encounter: rather, the "unfolding process" is something they are in. This position differs little from that of many deep ecologists.

This is not to deny the significance of individual human life and experience. Whitehead (1978) whose “process philosophy” has had some influence on the way the deep ecological position has developed, took the view that all aspects of the universe are moving towards the realisation of ever greater richness of experience. Murray Bookchin (1980) argues that evolutionary processes strive towards the realisation of ever greater degrees of individuation, freedom and selfhood. The same perspective is behind Rogers’ notion that organismic choice is “guided by the evolutionary flow” (1980, p. 127).

Thus, when we provide a climate that permits persons to *be* – whether they are clients, students, workers or persons in a group - we are not involved in a chance event. We are tapping into a tendency which permeates all organic life – a tendency to become all the complexity of which the organism is capable”. (ibid., p.134).

To work as client-centered therapists within such a framework is not to make a significant change in what we do, but it may enlarge our perception of its significance.

ECOCENTRIC VALUING

Some forty years ago, Rogers developed the notion that unconditional positive regard is one of the necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic growth. At that time his theory and methodology were sufficiently embedded in the Promethean fantasy for him to argue only that such an attitude is therapeutically effective (ie. it “works”) and that he could provide an adequate theoretical explanation, or *how* it “works”. However, if we can get out of the Promethean mindset we may become interested in other aspects of this question, as he did. Is our interest in people egocentric and utilitarian? Do we value them only because they contribute to our income, our sense of competence, our professional advancement, our emotional satisfaction, our need for relationship? Or are they innately worthy of respect? Is the attitude of unconditional positive regard (non-judgmental acceptance, respect, caring, prizing, non-possessive love) something that we *ought* to bring to our relations with other human beings? Or is our entertaining such a moral imperative an indication that we are dominated by particular “conditions of worth” supplied by a professional or religious subculture? Or does “becoming the person we really are” mean becoming someone who no longer suppresses the organismic sense of unity with others, so that not to care for others would be incongruent with our true nature.

In ecopsychology similar questions arise. Is our interest in the planet egocentric and utilitarian? Do we adopt an environmentally sensitive attitude and work to raise other people’s environmental awareness simply because “it works” to save the human and nonhuman world from catastrophe? If I put my energy into saving the planet is it enough to do so because in doing so I save myself, my children and grandchildren, my species? Or is the planet of value for its own sake, regardless of its usefulness to human beings? Is there a cosmic purpose that provides a moral imperative to environmental activism? Is concern for the planet simply an expression of our true nature, relieved of its egocentric distortions?

Caring for our client and caring for our planet may be not so much an expression of our morality as they are an expression of our identity. If we can occasionally get out of the Promethean mindset which asserts our autonomy and defines both our client and the rainforest as “other”, if we can set aside the Cartesian-Newtonian fantasy that the observer and the observed are different phenomena, we may find that accepting that we *are* our world has inevitable consequences in how we treat it/us – in all its/our human and nonhuman manifestations. Arguments about the necessity, sufficiency and unconditionality of “positive regard” take on a different aspect within the Gaia fantasy.

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ECOCENTRIC EMPATHY

In conventional discussions of therapeutic empathy, the separate identities of the therapist and client are taken for granted. However, if we cease to assert this essential separateness as axiomatic, our notion of empathy can change somewhat. If, moreover, we allow ourselves to abandon the modernist assumption that all knowledge originates in seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling or touching objects outside the boundary of our skin, we can contemplate the possibility that we can know another person's subjective experience directly. Mahrer (1983) has argued along similar lines in his description of experiential psychotherapy. Talbot (1997) has provided evidence that the somatic sharing of a client's internal experience is not uncommon among therapists. Rogers himself suggests in his later writing that we recognise a transpersonal, boundary-crossing experience of empathy.⁵ We are not compelled to understand empathy according to Rogers' early formulation, which makes it a cognitive act by which we enter the perceptual world of the other and thereby understand it *as if* it were our own.⁶ We can, by contrast, think of empathy as the dissolution of the boundaries by which we assiduously maintain our sense of self, in order to let the experience of the client be our own experience. We can think of empathy not as communication but as identification, not just with a particular client but with the "unity in process" which is manifested at this moment in this client. In this we would be following the vision not of the scientist, who needs an objective world to work on, but of the poet and artist who trusts that her subjective experience is the world's subjective experience and understands that, if she lets herself be open to the pathos of the world, she can find in her own internal experience an enduring statement of how the world is.

Rogers remarks in more than one place that the more intensely personal and individual a communication is, the more universal it is. In *A Way of Being* he comments on the peculiar satisfaction to be found in really hearing somebody:

It is like listening to the music of the spheres, because beyond the immediate message of the person, no matter what that might be, there is the universal. Hidden in all of the personal communications which I really hear there seem to be orderly psychological laws, aspects of the same order we find in the universe as a whole. So there is both the satisfaction of hearing this person and also the satisfaction of feeling oneself in touch with what is universally true (1980, p. 8)

Our psychology, even the fairly radical psychology of client-centered therapy, has trouble in expanding the notion of empathy. We think we can talk about empathy with human beings well enough, but what could we possibly mean by empathy with the planet, empathy with animals? empathy with rocks and stones and trees? Martin Buber has many sympathetic commentators, who embrace with enthusiasm his distinction between *I - It* relationships and *I - Thou* relationships, but they are inclined to stop taking him seriously when he suggests that the two kinds of relationships exist not only in our encounter with other human beings, but in our encounter with the non-human world.

Those whose basic assumptions are grounded in the Mother story have no such problem. The systemic ecologist whose world is a wholly material web of life, sees the oneness of the system in which human beings are intrinsically connected with all material existence, and may have no interest in the meanings which individuals attribute to their experience of this. The pan-experiential philosopher is inclined to see deep empathy with the planet as the natural condition of human beings. The nature mystic cherishes and celebrates the experience of transcending of the boundary between the part and the Whole. Within such a perspective, the sense of separateness which turns empathy into a deliberate act of cognition is an

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aberration, and the notion that empathy only exists in relationships between two human individuals is a nonsense.

ECOCENTRIC CONGRUENCE

It seems to me that Rogers got it completely right when he developed a model of therapy in which the means and the end are identical – congruence. We are used to dealing with this idea on the individualistic level. If, in my interaction with my client, I am "all of a piece", if my thinking and feeling and talking and behaviour are all coming from the same place, if I am not telling lies to myself or my client, even lies I don't know about, the chances are that my client also will begin to function more congruently. We can push this a little further. Both I and my client need to be congruent not only in thinking and feeling and behaviour, not only in our awareness and our unconscious processes, and not only within our own organism. We need also to be congruent with what we call the "natural world". We need to be in harmony with the rhythms of nature. So does our culture, so does our species. Humanistic therapies have always been grounded in the notion that the separation of mind and body is pathological. We are now becoming aware of the deep pathology that has come from the modernist separation of culture and nature. The incongruence between who we as individuals think we are and who our total organisms know we are can be perceived as an expression of the incongruence between our culture and nature. The client-centered therapist can both offer and invite "deep congruence", just as she can both offer and invite "deep empathy" and "deep acceptance". Not only can but must, if she is not to be irrelevant.

Client-centred therapy works at the client's point of discomfort, the point of incongruence between the client's organismic experiencing and his symbolisation of this experiencing. In Rogers' early formulations he depicted culturally imposed "conditions of worth" as largely responsible for this incongruence and asked us to trust in the client's actualising tendency to provide the energy and direction for change. Personal change in the perspective of client-centered therapy means becoming what we already are. Or rather, expressing in our surface behaviour and awareness what we already are at depth. A shift of focus from individual to planet enables us to entertain the notion that this emerging awareness is the planet's emerging awareness of itself.

The place of culture in this is problematic.

Culture can be thought of as mediating between planet and individual. From the Hero perspective the cultural group is simply a collection of individuals who through an ongoing process of communication end up sharing much the same thoughts attitudes and assumptions about the world. From the Mother perspective, the group is primary: it gives birth to the individual as a particular manifestation of its life and its truths. Cultures themselves may be congruent or incongruent with the planet. It is plausible to suggest that our current global predicament is a consequence of the incongruence between the Western-dominated global culture and the planetary environment in which it exists. Indigenous cultures which have been congruent with the planet for thousands of years have been or are being rapidly destroyed.

We might posit an ideal world in which there is no conflict between the formative tendency of the individual, the conditions of worth imposed by the culture, and the maintenance of the total ecological system of which both the individual and the cultural group are elements. There would be no need for therapy in such a world. In the world in which therapy does have a place there are aspects of culture which are ultimately dysfunctional and which have predictably catastrophic consequences. In such a world, certain aspects of culture are an

impediment to the individual's proper relationship to the planet, as a disease might be an impediment to an organ's (or a cell's) proper relationship to the body. In such a world, the process of client-centered therapy inevitably involves the client in focusing on himself. "Not only is there movement from symptoms to self, but from *environment to self* and from *others to self*" (Rogers, 1951 p.135. Italics in original). In such a world, the client-centered therapist pursues the point of discomfort in the client's subjective experience on the understanding that as the nature of the client's incongruence comes into his awareness and as he finds the feelings which are congruent with his organismic experiencing and the words and images which are congruent with his feelings, he will be reborn as the person he "naturally" is. Or, to switch from the Gaia-images of birthing and growth to the Promethean image of emancipation, he will emerge from the prison of his culturally embedded prejudices, introjected values and "conditions of worth" as a free and autonomous person whose freedom and autonomy are totally compatible with the nature of the larger world.

We need not limit this model of change to our thinking about the increasing congruence of the individual. We can postulate that the formative tendency functions in a similar way in the cultural collective, that the same progress from vulnerability to anxiety to awareness is potential in the cultural collective as it strives (in spite of its distortions) to become congruent with the "becoming" of the ecosystem as a whole. The uneasy emergence of environmental, feminist and communitarian movements in recent decades within the dominant individualistic-competitive global culture can perhaps be understood in just these terms. Therapists can be agents of change for their cultures or sub-cultures, not only through their work with individuals but by approaching the cultural collective as a whole – with the same empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard as they bring to their individual clients. There is a need to reframe political and environmental activism in this way, as Rogers himself began to do in his most mature work. As long as the cultural group is collectively "vulnerable to anxiety", and as long as the therapist can find an opportunity to establish contact and communication with it, the principles of client-centered therapy may provide a means to facilitate its transformation.

CONCLUSION

The Hero stories of the great classical mythologies, and the Hero stories of modernist science and psychology depict the struggle for egoic consciousness to emerge from the darkness of unconsciousness, the chaos of Nature, the tumult of uncontrolled energies. By contrast, the Mother stories of religious traditions, Nature philosophies and ecological science do not see chaos and darkness and tumult but an order which may be beyond our comprehension. The point of this essay is not to assert the legitimacy of one of these stories and to belittle the other, but to argue that we must hold the two in tension. To cite the axiom of Neils Bohr, the founding father of quantum physics: "Opposites are not contradictory but complementary" (in Reaney, 1994, p. 9).

A conviction that *All is One* does not have to cancel out an appreciation of separateness and diversity. On a cosmic scale the unfolding of the universe is manifested in two opposing processes which work together; one process *creates* by separating out the richness and diversity of the many, the other process draws into *unity* the divisions that are so created, so the cosmic balance is maintained.

Any act of creation involves a separation from the primal matrix, or from the human mother, or from undifferentiated experience. Reaney describes gravity as "the yearning of divided matter to again be one – the desire of fragmented energy to restore the union that was violated by the act of its birth" (1994, p. 132). On the human scale, we can describe the drive to

relationship, whether manifested in lust, loneliness or the therapeutic conditions, as grounded in a drive to union not just with a specific other but with Gaia, mother of us all.

Rogers was able to express the cosmic paradox in human terms. He was convinced that human beings have a natural tendency to care for one another, to submerge ego in the oneness of relationship. Paradoxically, he was convinced also that a caring relationship fosters creativity and diversity. So the unfolding process stays in balance. Likewise, he placed a high value on creativity and diversity, on the uniqueness of the individual's response to her world when no longer constrained by fear; yet his experience and observation of this uniqueness convinced him that it is grounded in the universal.

I am not suggesting that we can live in the kind of symbiotic union with the planet which seems to have been experienced by our stone age ancestors, any more than I am suggesting that a focus on personal development will find us a way out of our present social and environmental predicament. Neither am I arguing that we have to follow Rogers into the language of "spirituality" and "mysticism".⁷ However, I do believe that we must learn to acknowledge both the primacy of the individual and the primacy of the planet. We have to learn to live simultaneously in the fantasy of the many and the fantasy of the one. We have to recognise that both the Hero story and the Mother story tell us not how it used to be in this world or how it ought to be, but how it is. The mythologies of the great classical cultures represent a world where each god has his or her distinct truth, and all must be acknowledged. For Rogers, also, reality was multiple (1980, chap. 5).

The literature of ecopsychology is still somewhat limited. To this point, those who have entered the field have been more inclined to call on Jung and Maslow than on Rogers for eco-compatible insights into psychological processes (eg. Fox, 1990; Roczak, 1995; Wilber, 1996). This is not surprising. Both professional and popular perceptions of Rogerian theory perceive it as entirely individualistic. I suggest that a better understanding of client-centered theory and practice might give ecopsychologists an appropriate way of dealing, both theoretically and practically, with human psychopathology. Might I suggest, also, that an increased openness to an ecological perspective might enable client-centered therapists to demonstrate the relevance of their work in a situation of global emergency.

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NOTES

¹ Naess’s distinction between “shallow” and “deep” ecology is similar to distinctions made between “technocentric” and “ecocentric” environmentalism (O’Riordan), “environmentalism” and “social ecology” (Bookchin), “homocentric” and “transpersonal” ecology (Fox), “reformist” and “radical” approaches to environment (Sessions and Devall). Deep ecologists argue that the nonhuman world should be conserved, preserved and valued for its own sake rather than because of its use value to humans, dispute the dualism which places “the environment” outside of humans to be either exploited or conserved for our benefit, and base their theorising in an intuitive sense of the unity of all life. The European philosophical foundations of deep ecology are to be found in Heidegger, Spinoza and Whitehead. It is not surprising that many of the most influential figures in the deep ecology movement are Buddhists.

² Rank saw our basic anxiety as coming from our separation from *Mother* (both human and cosmic) in the trauma of birth. Our search for relationship comes from the anxiety of separation and the desire to re-experience the

primal unity. In such a perspective, the relationship offered by the therapist has, in itself and regardless of technique, the potential to be healing - a healing which is manifested in an increasing capacity for choice.

³ The boundaries we put on the ecosystem are clearly as arbitrary as the boundaries we put on the self.

⁴ Fox is at pains to point out (1990) that identification means “the experience not simply of a sense of *similarity* with an entity but a sense of *commonality*..... What identification should not be taken to mean, however, is *identity* - that I literally *am* that tree for example. What is being emphasised is the tremendously *common* experience that through the process of identification my sense of self (my experiential self) can expand to include the tree, even though I and the tree remain physically “separate”. (p. 231f. italics in original)

⁵ Rogers cites with approval a participant in one of his workshops:
“...I felt the oneness of spirit in the community. We breathed together, we felt together, even spoke for one another. I felt the power of the “life force” that infuses each of us - whatever that is. I felt its presence without the usual barricades of “me-ness” or “you-ness” - it was like a meditative experience when I feel myself as a centre of consciousness. And yet with that extraordinary sense of oneness, the separateness of each person present has never been more clearly preserved” (1990, p. 148).

⁶ It has often been pointed out that the assumption that the observer and the observed are separate phenomena has long been abandoned in quantum physics but is sedulously maintained in the social and behavioural sciences which look to the “hard sciences” for their validation. I suggest that the separation of therapist-observer-subject and client-observed-object in Rogers’ early formulation of empathy is a manifestation of this powerful, but challengeable, assumption.

⁷ We should note that in *A Way of Being* Rogers seeks validation for his ideas not in “mystical writings” but in science.