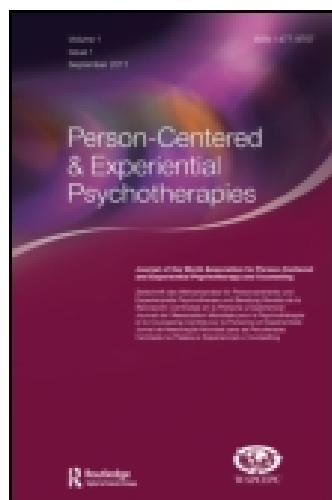


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Incongruence and “inner experience”

Campbell Purton^a

^a Centre for Counselling Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

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THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Incongruence and “inner experience”

Campbell Purton*

Centre for Counselling Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

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This paper is concerned with a well-known theoretical difficulty in Rogers' concept of incongruence. It is the difficulty that when a person is incongruent part of their experience is said to be denied to awareness, but that makes it hard to see how an incongruent person can be (come) aware of their incongruence. Rogers pictures “experience” as something “inner”, to which the person can attend; but experiences that are not in awareness cannot be attended to. I argue that the problem arises from the misleading picture of experience as “inner,” and I develop an alternative account that draws on the work of Wittgenstein. In that account to attend to one's feelings or attitudes is not to direct one's attention “inwards” but to attend to one's situation and to the articulation of one's response to it. Such articulation involves “telling a story,” and I suggest that my account fits well with current work on incorporating narrative therapy into the person-centred approach.

Keywords: incongruence; congruence; experience; narrative therapy; Wittgenstein; Rogers

Inkongruenz und “innere Erfahrung”

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit einer bekannten theoretischen Schwierigkeit in Rogers' Konzept der Inkongruenz. Wenn eine Person inkongruent ist, sagen wir, dass Teile ihrer Erfahrung vor dem Bewusstsein geleugnet werden. Das macht es schwer zu sehen, wie sich eine inkongruente Person sich der eigenen Inkongruenz bewusst werden kann. Rogers skizziert “Erfahrung” als etwas “Inneres”, dem sich die Person zuwenden kann; aber Erfahrungen, die nicht im Bewusstsein sind, denen kann man sich nicht zuwenden. Ich lege dar, dass das Problem aus dem irreführenden Bild von Erfahrung als “innerer” resultiert, und ich entwickle eine Alternative, die sich auf das Werk von Wittgenstein stützt. Mit diesem Konzept bedeutet es, wenn man sich den eigenen Gefühlen oder Haltungen zuwendet, keine Wendung der Aufmerksamkeit nach “innen,” sondern dass man sich der eigenen Situation und der Artikulation der eigenen Reaktion darauf zuwendet.

Incongruencia y “experiencia interior”

Este artículo se refiere a una muy conocida dificultad teórica, el concepto de Rogers de incongruencia. Esta dificultad consiste en que cuando una persona es incongruente parte de su experiencia parece estar negada a la conciencia, pero lo que lo hace mas difícil aun es ver cómo una persona incongruente puede ser-volverse consciente de su incongruencia. Rogers describe la “experiencia” como algo “interno”, a lo que la persona puede alcanzar, no así a las experiencias que no están en la conciencia. Sostengo que el problema surge de la imagen engañosa de ver a la experiencia como

*Email: purtonc@hotmail.com or c.purton@uea.ac.uk

“interna”, y desarrollo una versión alternativa que se basa en la obra de Wittgenstein. Según mi versión alcanzar nuestros sentimientos o actitudes no es dirigir la atención “hacia dentro” sino ocuparse de nuestra situación y la articulación de nuestra respuesta a la misma.

L'incongruence et “l'Expérience intérieure”

Cet article traite d'une difficulté théorique bien connue concernant le concept d'incongruence de Rogers. Il s'agit de la difficulté suivante : quand une personne est incongruente on dit qu'une partie de leur expérience n'a pas accès à la conscience, il est donc difficile de voir comment une personne incongruente peut devenir consciente de son incongruence. Rogers se représente « l'expérience » comme quelque chose « d'intérieur » à laquelle la personne peut rester attentive, mais les expériences qui ne sont pas conscientes ne peuvent pas bénéficier de cette attention. J'argumente que le problème est posé par l'image de Rogers d'une expérience « intérieure », et j'élabore une compréhension alternative inspirée par le travail de Wittgenstein. Selon cette compréhension, rester attentif à ses sentiments ou attitudes n'est pas diriger son attention « vers l'intérieur », mais plutôt rester attentif à sa situation et à l'expression de sa réponse à celle-ci.

不一致と「内的体験」

本論文は、ロジャーズの不一致の概念における有名な理論的困難さに関心を置いている。人が不一致のとき、自身の体験の一部に気がつく事を否定すると言われる。しかし、どのように不一致の人が自身の不一致に気づくかが分かるのは難しい。ロジャーズは「内面」の何かとして「体験」することを想像する。そしてそこに人は存在する。しかし、認識出来ない経験は対応される事がない。私は、問題は「内面」としての体験の紛らわしい絵から生じると主張する。そして、Wittgensteinの仕事をもとに、私は新しい報告を開発する。その人の感情または態度に対応することは、その人の「内部」を気にかけることを導かず、その人の状況や、反応への明確な表現が結果として生じる。

Introduction

In his paper “The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change,” Rogers (1957/1990, p. 222) defined incongruence as follows:

Incongruence is a basic construct in the theory we have been developing. It refers to a discrepancy between the actual experience of the organism and the self picture of the individual insofar as it represents that experience.

In other places he uses the term “awareness” rather than “self picture,” in speaking of congruence and incongruence:

Congruence is the term we have used to indicate an accurate matching of experiencing and awareness. It may be still further extended to cover a matching of experience, awareness and communication. (Rogers, 1961, p. 339)

Similarly *incongruence*, in Rogers' thought, refers to a *mis*-matching of, or a “discrepancy between,” experiencing and awareness, although it can also refer to a mis-matching between awareness and communication. As several commentators have observed

(Lietaer, 1993, p. 18; Mearns & Thorne, 1988, pp. 84–85), this means that there are two kinds of congruence; the first kind is a matter of awareness matching experiencing, while the second kind is a matter of communication matching awareness. Correspondingly, *incongruence* may be a matter of a lack of match between awareness and experiencing, or it may be a matter of a lack of match between awareness and what is communicated. The mismatch between awareness and what is communicated doesn't seem to involve any conceptual difficulties: it is essentially a matter of lying or of being deceptive. It is the mismatch between awareness and experiencing that is the more interesting case, since this amounts to *self*-deception, and there is clearly a puzzle about how it is possible to deceive *oneself*. There has been considerable discussion of this matter in the philosophical and psychological literature (e.g. Fingarette, 1969; Fingarette, 1998; McLaughlin & Rorty, 1988; Mele, 2001), and to some extent the present paper is a contribution to that discussion. One crucial term in Rogers' account of "congruence" and "incongruence" is "matching". Rogers pictures congruence as analogous to the matching of two triangles which are of the same shape and size (Kirschenbaum, 1979, p. 196). In geometry such triangles are called "congruent" – they fit exactly. If we restrict the discussion to the first variety of congruence then the idea is that awareness may or may not fit (match, represent, correspond with, accurately symbolise) experiencing. Where the fit is not good we have "incongruence."

In order to appreciate what Rogers means by "incongruence," we need then to examine what he means by "awareness," what he means by "experiencing," and what is involved in the "matching" of the two. "Awareness" need not detain us long, since it is clear that for Rogers (1959, p. 198) to be aware of something is to be able to symbolize it, usually in words; he explicitly defines "awareness" to mean the same as "symbolization." This, I think, is close to the ordinary use of "awareness:" to be aware that something is so is to be able to say that it is so. Rogers also equates "consciousness" with "awareness,"¹ which is more dubious (White, 1964, pp. 41–60)², but that point need not affect the rest of my discussion if we take it that by "consciousness" Rogers means simply "awareness," that is, "being able to say."

Rogers' concept of experience

"Experience" (or "experiencing" – Rogers doesn't make a distinction between the two) is a term that is much more problematic. Rogers writes (1959, p. 197) that "experience is all that is going on in the envelope of the organism at any given moment which is potentially available to consciousness. It includes events of which the individual is unaware, as well as of all the phenomena which are in consciousness."

However, as Brodley (2001, p. 67) points out, he also uses "experience" in a narrower sense. For example, Rogers (1961, p. 341) writes of congruence as involving a person's "...actual *physiological* experience being accurately represented in his awareness." He does not mean to include physiological events such as neuron discharges or changes in blood sugar that are "not available to awareness" (Rogers, 1959, p. 197), but he does use phrases such as "sensory," "visceral" and "organic" to convey what he means by "experience." He writes "To experience means simply to receive in the organism the impact of the sensory or physiological events which are happening at the moment" (Rogers, 1959, p.197).

By "sensory," "visceral," "organic" or "physiological" experience I take it that Rogers means bodily feelings such as muscular tensions, feelings of hunger and thirst, sinking feelings in the stomach, physical aches and pains, vague churning feelings associated with

emotional responses. I think that Brodley is right to distinguish this narrower sense of “experience” from a wider sense in which experience includes anything of which one is aware, such as what one can see or hear, one’s emotions, memories, thoughts, attitudes, and so on. However, I don’t think we would get far if we tried to decide which sense of “experience” – the wide one or the narrow – Rogers normally employs in his theory. For on the one hand it seems clear that when he writes of congruence and incongruence he is thinking of the matching or mis-matching of awareness with a wide range of experiences, including perceptions, emotions and so on. But on the other hand there are the pervasive references to the sensory, the visceral, the organic. It is as if Rogers wants “experience” to have its wide sense, but for it somehow to be at the same time “visceral.” The question of why Rogers employs this curiously hybrid notion of experience is one to which I shall return at the end of this paper.

A second important issue is that, for Rogers, experience “includes events of which the individual is unaware, as well as of all the phenomena which are in consciousness” (Rogers, 1959, p. 197). He also frequently writes of “experience that is denied to awareness” (pp. 202, 216). This way of using the term “experience” can lead to confusion, since in the *ordinary* sense of “experience,” to experience a feeling is no different from being conscious of the feeling. If someone who has been injured is asked whether they experience any pain, and they say “No,” then, unless they are lying, that settles the matter. Later they may acknowledge that they *were* in some pain at the time, but the fact remains that they didn’t *experience* any pain (they were not conscious of any pain) at the time.³ We will need to keep in mind that Rogers uses “experience” in this special way that allows for the possibility of “experiences” of which one is not conscious. For clarity I will flag this special Rogerian use of “experience” and its cognates with a subscript: “experience_R,” “experiencing_R.”

Rogers (1959, p. 197) writes that although there can be experiences_R that are not in one’s consciousness, they must be “potentially available to consciousness.” Now there is a sense in which there are innumerable things – such as what time it is now, what we are going to do tomorrow, what the capital of France is – of which we are not conscious at any particular moment, yet which are immediately available to consciousness if, for example, we are asked about them. For Freud, this is the realm of “the pre-conscious.” Then, more interestingly, there are things of which we are not aware – such as our meanness, our dislike of a colleague, our childhood feelings for our parents; things which are not immediately accessible to consciousness even when we *are* asked. Yet we *do have* these feelings or attitudes, as may be very clear to other people, and as we may in time come to acknowledge for ourselves. For Freud this is the realm of “the unconscious;” for Rogers it is the realm of “experiences_R denied to awareness.” As Ivan Ellingham (2001) has suggested, in this respect Rogers’ account does not differ significantly from Freud’s.

However, Freud’s account can be approached in more than one way. We do not have to take very seriously the picture of “the unconscious” as a hidden realm in which feelings and attitudes exist “in the dark” as it were. We may, rather, interpret him as saying that there are feelings and attitudes that at the time we are unable to express, although later – perhaps only after therapy – we *are* able to express them. In that regard the situation is little different from what it is in the case of “the preconscious.” We don’t have to imagine that there is a realm called “the preconscious mind” in which there lurks “the knowledge of what we are going to do tomorrow.” It is just that if we are asked, we *can say* what we plan to do tomorrow – this is an *ability* of a kind which human beings just have. Similarly we can think of “in the unconscious” as picture-talk that is used in cases where someone

has feelings or attitudes which they can express only with great difficulty, or only after some therapeutic intervention.

Nevertheless, there is a problem, or at least a tension, for Rogers, which doesn't arise for Freud. Freud can say of a client "This man clearly hates his father, but the hatred is unconscious. Part of the task of therapy will be to bring the hatred into the client's consciousness. The client denies that he hates his father, but that is due to resistance which needs to be overcome." Rogers might say what amounts to the same: "This man says that he feels no hatred (hatred is not in his awareness), but he is being incongruent, since there is hatred in his *experiencing_R*." But for Rogers there is now the problem that the therapist seems to be a greater authority on the client's experiencing than the client themselves, and that goes against the whole tendency of Rogers' approach in which the client is held to be the authority on their own experiencing.

I think it is true that in the *ordinary* sense of "experiencing" we should indeed resist the suggestion that someone else can know better than me what I am experiencing. But because Rogers doesn't use "experience" in its ordinary sense he can consistently say that a client *experiences_R* pain or hatred for his father (meaning that the client is in pain, or hates his father), but is not aware (conscious) of his pain or hatred. There is no contradiction there, but it does mean that Rogers, no less than Freud, must acknowledge that the client is not always the final authority on what they *experience_R*, since *experiences_R* are not always in awareness. The client is only the final authority when they are being congruent, that is, when there is no discrepancy between their awareness and their *experiencing_R*. Some person-centred therapists may be unhappy with the suggestion that a therapist can know better than the client what the client *experiences*, but I think that this difficulty arises from confusing experience with *experience_R*. The therapist can't know better than the client what the client *experiences*, but they may know better than the client what the client *experiences_R*. I am not thinking of implausible cases where a therapist is said to know what their client feels because the therapist is an "expert on the unconscious," but just of the ordinary fact that people are sometimes aware of what someone else feels before that person is aware of it. Indeed, if there were not cases of this sort then it would be hard to see how the term "incongruence" could have any application.

Thus far, provided we remember that Rogers uses the term "experience" in a special way, there is no reason to object to his account. However, there remains a problem about Rogers' way of *picturing* incongruence as a mis-match between awareness and *experiencing_R*. If incongruence is a matter of such a "mis-match," and the *experiencing_R* is denied to awareness, how can a client – how can anyone – know whether they are being incongruent (Haugh, 2001, p.121)? It might be said that other people can tell them that they are incongruent, but the difficulty is that the client can't see whether their critics are right, because the relevant part of their *experiencing* is denied to awareness. The same problem arises for Freud, since Freud's picture is little different from Rogers'. Freud held that the aim of therapy is to make what is unconscious conscious, but how is this to be done when the client is unconscious of what the therapist is trying to point out to them? According to the picture that Freud shares with Rogers, there are unconscious feelings "in the client's unconscious" or "in their *experiencing_R*," but because the feelings are unconscious the client's attention can't be drawn to them. Here I think we do come to a place where talk of "the unconscious" (Freud) or "*experiencing_R* denied to awareness" (Rogers) is seriously misleading.

The “inner” and the “outer”

I think that if we are to understand what Freud and Rogers are trying to convey in their talk about “the unconscious becoming conscious” or “awareness coming to match experiencing_R” we need to abandon the picture they work with. It is the picture (which has dominated Western thought at least since Descartes) of a human being having both “inner” and “outer” aspects. The outer aspect is “the body” and its movements; the inner aspect is what has variously been called “consciousness,” “subjective experience,” “the experiential field,” “the phenomenal field” (Rogers, 1959, p. 197). According to this picture we observe people’s bodies and movements, but have no direct access to their consciousness. On the other hand we do have direct access to our own consciousness. Thus, according to the picture, we can be conscious of our own pain, but we can only infer that others are in pain through studying their behavior. In short, while we can be sure about our own experiencing, we can never know for sure what other people are experiencing. (This of course is the classical philosophical problem about “our knowledge of other minds”).

Such a picture of “the inner” has been strongly challenged by some twentieth-century philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger. I have found Wittgenstein’s approach⁴ to be the clearest, and what follows is based on his thought. Wittgenstein (1992, p. 84) writes:

The ‘inner’ is a delusion. That is: the whole complex of ideas alluded to by this word is like a painted curtain drawn in front of the scene of actual word use.

This does not mean that Wittgenstein is some sort of behaviorist, although that is a common misconception; it means that he thinks that our whole way of talking about “inner events versus outer events” is misleading. He is not denying that people *feel pain*, for example, but is pointing out that the primary function of an utterance such as “I’m in pain” is not to report or describe anything (whether “inner” or “outer”) but to respond to a situation in a way that is functionally equivalent to a non-linguistic response such as a cry or a scream. Exclaiming “I’m in pain,” or “It hurts!” is in many contexts no different from exclaiming “Ouch!,” and saying “Ouch!” is clearly not a report of an inner experience, since it is not a report at all.

In what follows I have drawn on my own understanding of Wittgenstein, and it seems to me that he argues like this: consider an example of something that we might regard as a typical example of an “inner event,” such as pain. The corresponding “outer event” would be pain *behavior*, such as screaming or writhing. According to the “inner-outer” picture the person who is writhing on the floor with blood pouring from a wound is also a person who also has an intense inner experience. That inner experience is what we call “pain,” although a behaviorist would say that this is wrong, and that it is the writhing that is the pain. Wittgenstein challenges both accounts of what it means to say that someone is in pain. If we think within the “inner-outer” picture it is hard to account for how children learn to use the word “pain.” They can’t learn it by associating the word “pain” with another’s inner pain-event, precisely because that event is “inner” and therefore “hidden.” According to the picture, pain – unlike writhing and groaning – is not visible or audible. But nor do they learn that “pain” means such things as writhing (the behaviorist error), since that would make it incomprehensible why we should feel that anything needs to be *done* when a person is in pain – as if one could say quite unproblematically, on looking into a room, “Oh yes, Bruno is walking up and down, Charlie is writhing in pain, and

Emma is looking out of the window.” Making pain into something “inner” makes it invisible to others; making it into something “outer” makes it an event with no implications for what needs to be done.

Wittgenstein suggests that we learn the use of the word “pain” not as a description of an “inner” event, nor as a description of an “outer” form of behavior. “Pain” is not primarily used as a *description* at all. Rather, to say “Charlie is in pain” is primarily an *expression* of the same sort as “Poor Charlie!” and that linguistic expression is an extension of the natural impulse we have to relieve and comfort him (Wittgenstein, 1963, p. 178). Similarly, “I am in pain” should not be construed as a description of an inner state; it is primarily an expression of the same sort as “That hurts!” or “Ouch!,” and those expressions are linguistic replacements for non-linguistic responses such as groaning or screaming (Wittgenstein, 1963, p. 89).

Much the same applies in the case of emotions. Consider jealousy for example: Jealousy is a common pattern in human life – we speak of someone being jealous in situations where, roughly, one person wants some special attention from another, but the other gives more attention to a third person. Such situations often arise in early childhood, for example when a mother gives attention to a sibling, and the other child becomes upset or angry, and tries to displace the sibling in order to get mother’s attention. In this sort of situation we see clearly that the child is jealous. Their jealousy is manifested in their behavior in that particular kind of situation. Then as the child begins to develop its linguistic capacity, parents may, instead of simply responding behaviorally, say “You are jealous.” Later the child begins to recognize the situation and behavior that is characteristic of jealousy, and can say to their sibling “Jealous!” or “You are jealous!” And finally they learn to say “Jealous!” or “I’m jealous” instead of trying to get the mother’s attention in the more primitive behavioral way. The utterance “I’m jealous” is here a new form of behavior that *replaces* the original behavior. It does not *describe* “external” behavior, but nor is it a *report* of “inner” events; it not a description or report at all. It is an *expression*, the linguistic version of a form of behavior that was initially manifested without language.

In *later* developments of language “He is in pain (jealous)” and “I am in pain (jealous)” *can* come to be used as descriptions or reports (Moyal-Sharrock, 2000). Whether they are being so used depends on the context. If I have hurt my arm rather badly and my friend says “What’s wrong?” and I reply “I’m in *pain*!” that is expression, and the friend naturally responds with expressions of concern. But if I am having a medical examination and the doctor says “Are you in pain or is it more of an ache?” and I say “I’m in pain” then I am reporting something to the doctor, and might be said to be describing what I feel. But these later descriptive uses of the word “pain” are built on the earlier expressive uses; they are reports of what in different circumstances I might naturally *express*. The words “I am in pain” or “He is in pain” are not used to describe “inner states;” and they are not *primarily* used to describe *at all*. That is why Wittgenstein says “The ‘inner’ is a delusion....like a painted curtain drawn in front of the scene of actual word use.”

A new approach to the nature of incongruence

With this background we can approach the notion of incongruence in a new way. Imagine a situation in which Charlie has been aware of Anneka talking to and smiling at Theo, and that he strides up to them, and says rather impatiently to Anneka “Come on, it’s late. We need to go. Goodbye, Theo.” Now fill in as much background as is needed to make it clear that Charlie is jealous, such as the fact that Charlie is attracted to Anneka, but is

unsure of her feelings for him, and so on. I take it that novelists, for example, can describe situations and behavior in such a way that we might say “That clearly is a case of jealousy” or “If that is not jealousy I don’t know what jealousy is.” Then imagine that, having observed these events, we ask Charlie whether he is jealous. He says – and he is not *lying* about his feelings – “No, I was just a bit anxious that it was getting late.” We regard Charlie as being incongruent, and I suggest that what this means is that we don’t believe that his words are related to his feelings as an *expression* of those feelings. That is, we don’t believe that in saying “I’m just a bit anxious” Charlie is speaking in a spontaneous, expressive way. We think that he is saying this because he doesn’t want to acknowledge that he is jealous, perhaps that he doesn’t want to be seen as a jealous person. In short, what he is *doing* in saying “I am anxious” is (among other things) trying to avoid criticism. Incongruence is present where it *seems* that we are expressing something, but we are not: we are doing something else.

We can now return to the question that looks unanswerable if we remain, like Freud and Rogers, within the picture of “inner” states and “outer” behavior. The question was how a client – how anyone – can know that they are being incongruent. We can see now that the difficulty arises because we misconstrue the utterance “I realize now that I am jealous” as a *report* on the person’s inner state. We picture them as scrutinizing their inner world and realizing that they have mistaken a feeling of jealousy for a feeling of anxiety, and now they report this to us. But to say in this context “OK, I’m jealous” is not to *report* anything; it is more in the nature of a confession. To confess is to express something that one had previously been unable or reluctant to express.

Our question now needs to be re-phrased as something like: “How is it possible for someone to express something *now* that they were not able to express before?” Well, what actually happens in such situations? It will go something like this: After Charlie has denied that he is jealous we say to him:

“But look, you are clearly attracted to Anneka.”

“Well, yes I suppose that is true.”

“And were you not feeling a bit annoyed with Theo when you strode across?”

“Yes, now you mention it, he has started to annoy me. To be honest, I’d like to punch him!”

“And this *getting annoyed* seems to have begun when those two started meeting regularly?”

“Hmm. Yes... that’s true”

“And in fact it was not really so late ... you could easily have stayed and talked with them for another five minutes.”

Charlie begins to look uncomfortable, and eventually says “Ok... you are right... I was feeling jealous.”

What is going on here is that we are drawing Charlie’s attention, not to any “inner events,” but to various aspects of the situation and his response to it. Such attending to the situation and to his response is something that Charlie clearly had not already done himself, for if he *had* done so, then, being familiar with what jealousy is (with what “jealousy” means), he would already have said to himself “Oh, my God – I’m *jealous*!”

Of course there is a range of possible cases here. Sometimes we don’t realize what we are feeling simply because, being absorbed in other things, we have not given enough attention to our situation or our response. At other times our inattention is *motivated* – we shy away from looking at something because uncomfortable or anxious feelings arise when we begin to look in that direction. It might be asked how it is possible to try to avoid seeing something unless we have already realized what it is. But I think the answer to that is that we respond to things long before we acquire the ability to express such responses in

language, and these “primitive,” non-linguistic responses are still there *after* we have acquired the linguistic ability. Charlie is in a situation in which his natural response is to barge in and take Anneka away from Theo. Young children do that sort of thing and we say that they are jealous. But if Charlie were to articulate his response linguistically that would involve saying to Anneka and Theo something like “Look, I’m jealous. I know it’s stupid, but there it is. I don’t want you two to go on meeting.” And then, he knows (although he does not express it, even to himself), there would be consequences, foreseeable or unforeseeable. So it is unsurprising that Charlie doesn’t get as far as expressing his response in language. But he doesn’t *straightforwardly* manifest it in his behavior either; that is, he doesn’t just barge in as a young child might, because that would be rude, inappropriate, uncivilized, or counter-productive. What he does is to *say* something – “I am just a bit anxious about the time” – that is not an *expression* of anything. It looks like an expression, but is really the linguistic *equivalent* of barging in: it has the same intended result of detaching Anneka from Theo. What he says needs to be understood as *behavior*; these words are a *deed*. As a deed they manifest his jealousy, but as words they do not express anything, though they seem to express anxiety about the time. That is what Rogers calls “incongruence.”

There are many cases in which we express ourselves *without* giving attention to the details of our situation. In these cases we just use the words that, in our linguistic community, we have learned as replacements for the relevant non-linguistic behavior. We spontaneously say such things in the way we spontaneously cry out, or run away. However, there are also cases of the kind just discussed, where we can only express ourselves correctly if we first pause to consider the situation. Such cases are common in psychotherapy, a point that has been especially emphasized by Gendlin (1996, p. 33; 1997, p. 225).⁵ A client says something, but then realizes that what they said does not articulate their response adequately. For example, they say “I felt ashamed.” But when the therapist reflects this back they sense that “ashamed” is not the right word. Then they pause, try again, and find a word that is better, perhaps “embarrassed.” How do they do that? We need to set aside the picture of them looking at an inner state and seeing if the new word “fits” that state better. What is really involved is something like this: they have learned the use of the word “ashamed” in contexts of someone responding to having done something that they feel is unworthy of them – that is, they normally use the word as English speakers use it. But then, in the present circumstances, they realize that *this* is not a context of having done something unworthy of them, but of having done something socially inappropriate. They may notice this explicitly, but more often their linguistic training enables them to say that “embarrassed” is a better word than “ashamed,” even though they can’t say why. Someone who wasn’t *at all* inclined to reject the word “ashamed” after giving attention to the details of the embarrassing situation would thereby show an inadequate grasp of English (and similarly, of course for any other language). It is *part of knowing English* that one knows that “embarrassed” and not “ashamed” is the word to use in *this* kind of situation.

That was an example of a situation in which the client – knowing a particular language – is able to find a word in that language that applies in the situation. However, it is quite often the case that there is no word in the language that seems quite right. In these circumstances a client may use a familiar word, but in a new way; in what we call a metaphorical way. For example, a client may say “My life is an empty box!” or “I am trapped!” The therapist reflects such an utterance back. When the client hears it back then either:

- (1) It feels just right, and they are happy to say it again.
- (2) It doesn't feel quite right, and they are no longer happy with saying it.

With metaphors we can't say that they are right or wrong, exactly. In that way they are different from non-metaphorical uses of words. We can say, for example, that a particular situation *just isn't* a situation for which "ashamed" is the right word, but we can't say that a particular situation *just isn't* a situation for which "empty box" is the right phrase. The question with metaphors is not whether the use of the word is correct, but whether it is *apt*. But how does the client know whether "trapped" or "empty box" is an apt metaphor?

Consider a situation where the therapist reflects what the client is saying, using a metaphor that the client *rejects*. For example, suppose the therapist says "You feel trapped," and the client says: "No – it's more like paralysed." The client may reject "trapped" because "trapped" is used in circumstances where a person or animal can move, but is restrained, whereas "paralysed" is used in circumstances where one can't move. The client may not be explicitly aware of this, but if they know English they can use these words "trapped" and "paralysed" in the appropriate situations. With "trapped" you can go on to ask e.g. "What exactly is constraining you? What could be a way out?" But these questions don't fit with "paralysed." For "trapped" to be an apt metaphor there needs to be something in the situation that could be seen as constraining, and it should make sense to ask about possible ways out – ways of getting rid of the constraint. The client knows (though may not be able to explain) the web of connections involved in "trapped." They also know (though may not be able to explain) that significant portions of this web don't exist in their situation, whereas much more of the web associated with "paralysed" does exist. So again, the answer to the question "How does the client know what to say?" can only be "Because they have learned English." An English speaker who gives attention to their situation isn't going to feel happy with the word "trapped" when the situation is one to which the word "paralysed" better applies.

This point about the finding of appropriate words and phrases can be extended to include more elaborate responses to situations. Indeed, when the client "tells the story" of their difficulty they are giving expression to how the situation is for them; they are trying to find a way of articulating their response to their situation. In telling their story they may make reference to other, shared, stories: for example they might say "Yes, I *am* jealous... but... I was thinking of *Anna Karenina* I'm jealous in the sort of way that Dolly is jealous of the governess, not in the way that Karenin is jealous of Vronsky." Narrative therapy (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Dwivedi, 1997; McLeod, 1997) could be seen as elaborating on the point that a crucial role of the therapist is to help the client to find a way of articulating their situation in a way that does justice to it. Some stories – and frequently the story with which a client begins – ignore important features of the client's situation; then the therapist needs to help the client to look further into the situation. But this is not well put by saying that the client needs to look more deeply into their "inner experiencing;" what they need to do is to reflect further on the *whole of their situation*, so as to find a better way of articulating their response to it.

Rogers and "the visceral"

Before concluding I would like to come back to the question of why Rogers uses the term "experience" to refer to a wide range of "mental phenomena," such as perceptions, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, intentions, but at the same time wants to say that experience is "sensory, visceral or organic." I think that the reason is that he pictures "mental

phenomena” as inner events or processes, and imagines that one comes to awareness of such inner phenomena through *turning one’s attention inwards*, through giving attention to “what is going on inside oneself.” Now one possible meaning of “what is going on inside me” takes “inside” to mean “in my body.” (Rogers’ curious phrase “within the envelope of the organism” should perhaps be interpreted in this way). In that sense we might say that visceral feelings of tension, tightness, or nausea, for example, are located “inside me.” Such sensations are certainly felt in the body, either at specific locations or more pervasively throughout the body. Then if we put together the idea that experience is “what goes on inside,” with the idea that “what goes on inside” is visceral, we will naturally conclude that experience is visceral. To put it another way, if what we experience is something inner, then in order to know what we are experiencing we will need to turn our attention “inwards,” that is, to what is happening in our body, and what we find when we do that is a range of bodily sensations. These, then, must be our “experiencing,” so that jealousy becomes a pang in the heart, anger a felt tension in the chest, and so on. If it is asked what visceral sensations constitute shame as contrasted with guilt (or embarrassment, or regret, or remorse), we might say that the differences are subtle, but that they “must be” there in the bodily experiencing. This already sounds rather implausible, but if we consider the visceral sensations that constitute *wanting to leave on Tuesday* rather than *wanting to leave on Wednesday*, it is surely evident that this talk of experiences in general as visceral is misguided.

There is nevertheless a sense in which “bodily responses,” are relevant in discussing incongruence. I have been suggesting that what incongruence amounts to is a failure in the articulation of our non-linguistic responses. In the example above Charlie is responding in a jealous way, and it is through his becoming aware of his responses in the situation (such as his inclination attack Theo, or to drag Anneka away) that he may come to be able to express them in words. Such non-linguistic responses are behavioral responses; they involve impulses to hit, grab and so on, and clearly “the body” is involved in such activities. Further, along with the behavioral impulses there will be changed muscle tensions, quickened breathing, raised heart rate and so on. Consciousness of such bodily feelings may alert Charlie to the fact that “something is going on,” and bring to his attention to what his impulses are – to what he would like to do. And that may lead him to realize that such impulses, in this sort of situation, can only be expressed in English by saying “I’m jealous!” If, instead, he says “I’m anxious about the time” what he says is *not* an articulation of his response; it is an evasion of any such articulation, and he is being incongruent.

Conclusion

I suggest that a Wittgensteinian approach to incongruence will incline us to move the notions of *situation*, *expression*, and *articulation of response* to the centre of our thinking, so that we will not picture incongruence as a mis-matching of awareness and experiencing_R. The problem with that picture is that it provides no way of understanding how a person can become aware of their own incongruence, because according to the picture incongruent experiencing_R is denied to awareness, and cannot be attended to. However we *can* have our attention drawn to the fact that what we say is not an expression or articulation of our non-linguistic response to our situation; in other words we *can* come to realize that there is a discrepancy between how we are responding and what we are saying. This view of things would encourage us to help clients find better articulations of their responses; it would lead us to, or confirm us in, practices of

encouraging clients to *express* their feelings, rather than report on them. It would emphasize the value of spontaneous response, of “speaking from the heart,” and of helping clients to find a better way of telling their story. Such an emphasis on “articulation of response” and of “finding a better story” fits with recent work on incorporating narrative approaches into person-centred and experiential therapy (Angus & Greenberg, 2011). However the way in which a better story is found will not be conceptualized in terms of giving further attention to the client’s “inner experiencing,” but in terms of attending further to their situation and to how they might respond to it. One is helping them to find a story that they can more fully *live*.

Notes

1. “Awareness, Symbolization, Consciousness. These three terms are defined as synonymous” (Rogers, 1959, p. 198).
2. The difference between awareness and consciousness seems to be that one can be aware of things of which one is not conscious in the moment. For example, there is a difference between “aware” as used in “When they met last week, she was aware of what he had done, and I’m puzzled why she didn’t ask him about it,” and “conscious” as in “While she was with him last week, she was very conscious of what he had done, but she didn’t actually say anything.” The first means that at the time they met she knew what he had done, but did not necessarily think about it during their meeting, while the second means that as they were talking she kept thinking about, or being troubled by, what he had done. A similar distinction is marked in Freud’s thought as that between the “pre-conscious” and the “conscious” – see below.
3. It is sometimes suggested that there can’t be cases where someone *is in pain*, yet is not *conscious* of it. But consider Norman Malcolm’s (1984, pp. 15–16) example of Horatio Hornblower, who is standing on the deck of his ship during a severe storm: “Hornblower found the keen wind so delicious that he was unconscious of the pain the hailstones caused him.”
4. Wittgenstein does not discuss the matter in a systematic way, so that it is hard to give brief references for the material. Within his major work *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1963/2009) one could begin with what he says on pages 4–6, 89–92, 97–104, 178, 187–189 (in the revised edition (Wittgenstein, 1963/2009) the corresponding pages are 7–10, 95–98, 103–111, 187, 196–198), but for those unfamiliar with Wittgenstein’s work it might be better to start with secondary sources such as Canfield (2007b). Wittgenstein (1992) is especially relevant. Other relevant secondary sources include ter Hark (1990), Vesey (1991), Moyal-Sharrock (2000) and Canfield (2007a).
5. I have discussed elsewhere how my analysis relates to Gendlin’s approach (Purton, 2012; 2014).

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