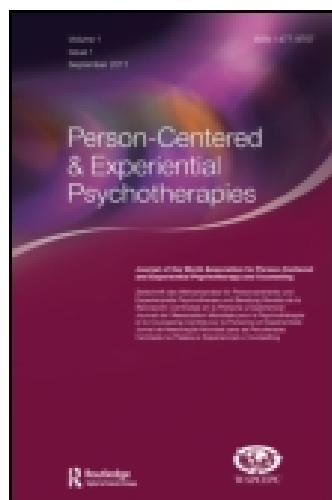


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Publisher: Routledge

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Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpcp20>

Anxiously congruent: congruently anxious

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Published online: 18 Oct 2013.

To cite this article: Bernie Neville (2013) Anxiously congruent: congruently anxious, Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies, 12:3, 223-236, DOI: [10.1080/14779757.2013.840671](https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2013.840671)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2013.840671>

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Anxiously congruent: congruently anxious

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(Received 21 August 2012; final version received 16 July 2013)

Søren Kierkegaard proposed that it is our capacity for despair and anxiety that makes us human. He suggested that despair is an indication of our capacity to be more than we currently are. We feel anxiety and despair because our potentiality is always greater than our actuality, when our living process is blocked or frustrated. As long as we are not all that we can be we are anxious, whether we are aware of it or not. Even without our existential anxiety we have reason enough to be anxious. We experience cosmic anxiety, political-social anxiety, environmental anxiety. The world is not in a good way. We may try to separate our awareness from our experience, through our various techniques of denial, but our organism knows better, and our denial only increases our stress. Congruence involves coming out of denial, and being open to our organismic anxiety

Keywords: existential anxiety; congruence; formative tendency; self-realization; ecological self

Ängstlich kongruent: kongruent ängstlich

Søren Kierkegaard argumentierte, dass es unsere Fähigkeit zu Verzweiflung und Angst ist, die uns menschlich macht. Er postulierte, dass Verzweiflung ein Hinweis ist auf unsere Fähigkeit, mehr zu sein, als was wir im Moment sind. Wir fühlen Angst und Verzweiflung, weil unser Potenzial immer größer ist als unsere Aktualität, wenn unser Lebensprozess blockiert oder frustriert ist. Solange wir nicht alles sind, was wir sein können, sind wir ängstlich, ob wir uns dessen bewusst sind oder nicht. Sogar ohne unsere existenzielle Angst haben wir Grund genug, ängstlich zu sein. Wir erfahren kosmische Angst, politisch-soziale Angst, Umwelt-Angst. Die Welt ist nicht in guter Verfassung. Wir können vielleicht unsere Bewusstheit mithilfe unserer verschiedenen Verleugnungstechniken von unserer Erfahrung trennen, aber unser Organismus weiß es besser und unsere Verleugnung erhöht nur unseren Stress. Kongruenz heißt, aus der Verleugnung herauszukommen und für unsere organismische Angst offen zu sein.

Ansiosamente congruentes: congruentemente ansiosos

Søren Kierkegaard afirma que es nuestra capacidad de desesperación y ansiedad lo que nos hace humanos. Sugirió que la desesperación es una indicación de nuestra capacidad de ser más de lo que somos actualmente. Sentimos ansiedad y desesperación porque nuestra potencialidad es siempre mayor que nuestra realidad, cuando el proceso de nuestra vida, está bloqueado o frustrado. Mientras que no somos todo lo que podemos ser estamos ansiosos, seamos o no conscientes de ello. Incluso sin nuestra ansiedad existencial tenemos razones suficientes para estar ansiosos. Experimentamos ansiedad cósmica, ansiedad político-social, ansiedad ambiental. El mundo no esta en

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buen estado. Podemos tratar de separar nuestra conciencia de nuestra experiencia, a través de nuestras diversas técnicas de negación, pero nuestro organismo sabe mejor, y nuestra negación sólo aumenta nuestro estrés. La congruencia implica salir de la negación y estar abiertos a nuestra ansiedad orgánica

Congruence anxieuse : anxiété congruente

Søren Kierkegaard propose que ce soit notre capacité au désespoir et à l'anxiété qui fait que nous sommes humains. Il suggère que le désespoir est une indication de notre capacité à être plus que ce que nous sommes dans l'instant. Nous ressentons l'anxiété et le désespoir parce que notre potentiel est toujours plus grand que nous-mêmes dans l'instant, quand notre processus vivant est bloqué ou frustré. Tant que nous ne sommes pas tout ce que nous pouvons être, nous sommes anxieux, que nous en soyons conscients ou non. Même sans notre anxiété existentielle, nous avons des raisons suffisantes pour être anxieux. Nous faisons l'expérience d'anxiété cosmique, d'anxiété politico-sociale, d'anxiété environnementale. Le monde ne va pas bien. Nous pouvons essayer de séparer notre conscience de notre expérience à travers nos techniques de déni diverses, mais notre organisme sait mieux, et notre déni ne fait qu'augmenter notre stress. La congruence implique de sortir du déni, et d'être ouvert à notre anxiété organique.

不安な一致：一致な不安

キルケゴールは、私たちを人と成らしめる絶望と不安の能力を提唱した。彼は、絶望は私たちの能力のしるしであるとした。私たちの生きているプロセスがブロックされたり、挫折したとき、私たちは不安と絶望を感じる。それは私たちの潜在性はいつも私たちの現実より偉大でありだからである。私たちがそれについて気がついているかどうかに関わらず、私たちが出来る全てが私たちではない限り、私たちは不安である。私たちの実存的な不安なしでさえ、私たちは不安である十分な理由がある。私たちは宇宙的な不安、政治的／社会的な不安、環境的な不安を経験する。この世界は、良い方向に向かっている。私たちは否定のいろいろな技術によって私たちの経験から私たちの気付きを分ける事を試みるかもしれない。しかし、有機体としての私たちは、より良い事を知っており、私たちの否定は、ただストレスを高める。一致は、否定から出てきて、有機体としての不安に対して受け入れる事が必要である。

Introduction

Carl Rogers suggested that one of the conditions for therapeutic growth is that the client is anxious or at least vulnerable to anxiety. What he did not say is that the outcome of successful therapy is the absence of anxiety. Just as he avoided writing of self-actualization as an end-state, preferring to theorize about the actualizing tendency, he writes about becoming "that self which one truly is" (Rogers, 1961, p. 163) not in terms of achievement but in terms of process – the process of "being one of the most widely sensitive, responsive and creative creatures on this planet" (Rogers, 1961, p. 178). Becoming congruent, for both therapists and clients, is a continuous process. We don't reach a point where we have achieved optimal congruence, nor a point where we are totally free from anxiety. Indeed, awareness of our anxiety may best be thought of as an aspect of congruence.

We tend to imagine anxiety to be a personal thing. A client is anxious about a relationship, a job, the future, his health. We find ways to deal with this. However, I

want to argue, as the existentialist philosophers have done, that anxiety comes with being human. They argue not only that we *should* be anxious, but that we *are* anxious, no matter what strategies we use to deny it. If that is so, congruence involves embracing that anxiety and finding ways to live with it. Incongruence involves the denial, conscious or unconscious, of who we really are.

I suggest that anxiety is over-determined. Our individual, personal anxiety is not grounded merely in the circumstances of our personal, relational lives. We are anxious because of the kind of universe in which our lives are embedded. We are anxious because we are faced with the inevitability of death and responsibility for making choices in a universe which we cannot demonstrate to be meaningful. We are anxious because we belong to a species which is destroying its home and itself. We are anxious because we are cells of a suffering planet. We might argue that the anxieties which arise from our inability to deal creatively with the peculiar circumstances of our lives have their source in these deeper layers of anxiety which we share with our culture and our species.

As long as we fail to acknowledge that this is our experience of life we are incongruent.

Being in the Universe

Brian Swimme (1996), in *The hidden heart of the cosmos*, suggests that if we want to get a sense of ourselves in the universe we need to get away from urban pollution and find somewhere where we can lie on our backs, look up at the night sky and gaze into the Milky Way.

When our earliest ancestors did this they probably felt awe as we do, but their sense of themselves was different from ours. In the first place they knew that they were in a container bounded by the earth below them and the sky above them. The earth was clearly flat, more or less, and the sky was a saucer-shaped disk over which the sun and moon and specks of light moved in a more or less regular fashion.

Our species spent millions of years evolving and adapting to such a world. Our brains are wired to have us look at the stars and imagine that we are standing on firm, unmoving ground and the stars are moving “up in the sky.” Even after Aristarchus went on record a couple of thousand years ago to say that the earth is round, and Ptolemy insisted that the sphere of the earth is the centre of the universe surrounded by seven rotating spheres – the still point in a turning universe – we kept imagining that we were looking “up” at the sky.

We know of course that when we look at the sky we are not looking “up” at all. Lie on the grass and gaze at the stars and realize that you are looking “down” into the three hundred billion stars of the Milky Way. We hover in space, only stuck to the Earth by gravity – whatever that is! We know now that the earth is not a still point but is spinning on its axis while spinning around the sun. Neither is the sun a still point. Our idea of “up” has no relation to the reality of a spinning earth, circling a spinning sun, at the centre of a solar system which is spinning round the outer edge of our galaxy at 290 kilometres a second, while the Milky Way itself is gliding through space like a giant mantra ray. No still point here. Yet we are biologically adapted to looking “up” at the sky, standing on solid ground in a stable and predictable universe.

When you are gazing at the night sky you may be able to pick out a faint blur of light in the Andromeda constellation. Edward Hubble discovered in the 1920s that this faint blur is not a star but a galaxy, a twin to the Milky Way, and that these two galaxies, with all their smaller satellite galaxies, constantly wheel around each other. And this cluster of galaxies is but one of thousands of clusters revolving around what is known as the Virgo

cluster, some 53 million light years away. And this whole supercluster is only one of the millions of superclusters hurtling away from each other in an expanding universe.

In the nineteenth century we could at least hang on to the notion that the universe was fixed and stable. In the 20th century we had to acknowledge that it isn't so. Even Einstein fought against the idea that the universe was expanding until Hubble persuaded him otherwise.

At least in the 20th century we could hang on to some notion of stability through our knowledge that the pace of expansion was slowing down, drawn back towards a fixed point by gravity. We don't know that any more. Now we know that space is expanding at an accelerating pace, which goes contrary to our experience of what happens when we throw things. Our common sense is assaulted again when we find that everything in the universe is rushing away from us – which places us at the centre of the universe. We might say that this puts us back where we started, were it not for the fact that an intelligent being on another speck of cosmic dust millions of light years away – provided the same or better technology is available – would find the same thing. Every point in the universe is at its centre. And all these centres are rushing away from each other as the space between them expands faster and faster. It makes no sense to us and only the mathematicians have a language to describe it. Each of us is the centre of an explosion. And the universe – or the multiverse – seems to be limitless and unpredictable.

We evolved to think that we are individual, separate beings, living in a world of things. Astronomy and physics tell us that it isn't true. Nothing holds us in existence but connectedness and process. The cosmos appears less and less to be the stable and predictable machine that we once thought it to be.

No wonder we are anxious. The tension between who we are and who we have evolved to think we are is uncomfortable.

Kirk Schneider (2004) suggests that it is our relation to the cosmos – our relation to infinity – which is the ground of our deep anxiety. We can't cope with the mystery of being. When we lie on the ground and look down into the universe, we don't fall off the earth. But the earth is falling, the solar system is falling, the galaxy is falling. The universe is falling – in every direction. We humans are entirely embedded in this phenomenon. To use Schneider's expression, we are in "free fall."

In our lives this manifests in the free fall of addiction, the free fall of compulsion, the free fall of depression, the free fall of rage. How we cope with this and help our clients to cope is the focus of existential psychotherapy. The human tendency is to defend against it through denial. The authentic response is to confront it, to live congruently in the awareness of our cosmic anxiety.

Coping with existence

Søren Kierkegaard did not have the understanding of the cosmos available to us, but he did get close to the notion of free fall when he described our dilemma: how to live a meaningful life on the edge of the abyss.

We are overwhelmed by too much possibility. We are accountable for not living up to our possibilities, yet we know that we cannot live up to them. We look into the abyss and feel giddy. We have to let ourselves experience our anxiety, let go of our illusions and admit that we are lost and helpless. Only then are we able "to be that self which one truly is." Only then are we congruent, capable of authentic being and able to stand up against the pressures to conform. Life is absurd. Being anxious is part of the deal. If you don't have anxiety you are in a bad way.

Kierkegaard (1985) proposed that it is our capacity for anxiety that makes us human. It is an indication of our capacity to be more than we currently are. As long as we are not all that we can be we are anxious, whether we are aware of it or not. There is no final escape from insecurity and uncertainty.

Nietzsche (1998) argued that God is dead. Modern society is empty without the god-myth, and what we need to do is find the courage to face this emptiness in order for something positive to emerge.

Schopenhauer (1994) was convinced that the ground of our anxiety is our fear of death. We can try to avoid death as much as we like but the anxiety won't be controllable until we accept that Death is the purpose of life. We must accept our anxiety and realize that our will to live is "perverted" because we identify with our individual will, obsessed with our individual survival. We need to let go of this. Life goes on without us. To be congruent is to live and act in the awareness that our fear of death is a front for our perverted desire to be individually immortal.

Heidegger (1978) likewise argued that awareness of death is fundamental to the human condition. We cannot really live a full life unless we are aware of death. However it is not death which arouses our anxiety, but freedom. We are thrown into the world and confronted with choice and a limited time to make our choices. If we are authentically ourselves we will stay aware of the temporary character of our being and avoid living a mediocre life.

Contemporary existential psychotherapists explore the same themes. We are terrified of having to live as an isolated individual, of being separated from the whole. Yet we also fear the loss of our individuality in death. We are tossed between these fears all our life, which accounts for the fact that we are inherently anxious, and our anxiety is too complex to be easily confronted. We know objectively that we will die. This makes us anxious so we find ways to deny it. The favoured way to deal with it is delusion. We delude ourselves into imagining that we are immortal. We do this by identifying with a tribe or nation so that we share in its ongoing life. We find an ideology or religion which promises us immortality. We imagine that we can achieve immortality through art, wealth, possessions, children, reputation. These delusions are supported by our culture, even by therapy.

Irving Yalom argues that the central aim of existential therapy is to dissolve the illusions we have constructed to avoid facing the realities of existence. We must deal with the conflict "that flows from the individual's confrontation with the givens of existence: death, isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness" (Yalom, 1980, p. 8). Confrontation with our existential situation may bring despair, yet acceptance of our existential situation "is painful but ultimately healing" (p. 14). Being congruent involves becoming aware of our situation. This is not comfortable, but this discomfort and vulnerability is a blessing as it may stir us to become more of what we can be. Our dissatisfaction may be transformed into a decision to change and we may begin to take responsibility for our life.

Viktor Frankl (1969) wrote of the existential vacuum which comes with the collapse of universal values. We live in a world where values and meanings are relativized, where rationality is suspect, where exchange has taken the place of substance. There appears to be no generally accepted ground on which to stand. We no longer agree about what we *must* do, or even what we *should* do. We may not even know what we want. When there is no such thing as a universal meaning, we have only the unique meanings of individual situations. Yet the will to meaning is at the core of our being. We don't know where to find it so we pursue sex, power and money instead.

Being congruent in the world as the existentialist philosophers and psychologists describe it is to live in awareness of the reality of human existence – variously depicted as absurd, meaningless or tragic. Even those like Kierkegaard and Frankl who don't believe that human life is meaningless acknowledge that it is not possible for us to find meaning through observation and logic. Meaning is to be found through faith, and faith is irrational.

Stuart Kauffman (2008) in *Reinventing the sacred* suggests that the existentialist focus on meaninglessness is a consequence of adopting the reductionist assumptions of mainstream science. Yet mainstream science does not have all the answers.

The existentialist insistence that we make our meaning in a meaningless universe by our choices and actions was a response to reductionism, in which the universe is meaningless. But life is part of the universe. In a newly envisioned universe, biosphere, and human culture of unending creativity, where life, agency, meaning, value, doing, and consciousness have emerged, and that we can create, we can now see ourselves, meaning-laden, as integral parts of emergent nature (Kauffman, 2008, p. 245).

Kauffman argues that even materialists and atheists can have, indeed need to have, faith in a meaningful universe. (Of course, proponents of the meaningless universe hypothesis will maintain that faith, whether we think we have discovered it or think we have constructed it, is just as delusional as all our other attempts to avoid confronting the brutal reality of our situation.)

Coping with catastrophe

Even without our existential anxiety we have reason enough to be anxious. The world is not in a good way. When we stop thinking about the global financial crisis we are still confronted with the threat of global catastrophe. We have strategies for remaining in denial, but we are nevertheless anxious. Our techniques of denial and distraction enable us to separate our awareness from our experience, but denial only increases our stress.

At the beginning of the 21st century we have a dozen reasons to conclude that human society is on the edge of destruction: environmental degradation, over-population, a deepening abyss between the rich and poor, a collapsing financial system, the exhaustion of non-renewable sources of energy, the greenhouse effect, holes in the ozone layer, extreme weather events, the starvation of millions, global warming, melting ice-caps, rising sea-levels, disappearing biodiversity, tribal conflict, uncontrollable pandemics, an ongoing and increasingly destructive arms race, the global slave trade, the displacement of populations, the global drug trade, pre-emptive wars, the engineering of hate and fear, epidemic mental illness. We find human alienation and frustration on a vast scale and ecological, financial, political and psychological feedback loops which seem to be rushing us towards catastrophe.

The sense of impending disaster is not new. We have been living with it for half a century. For decades we feared the imminent nuclear winter. We took a moment to draw breath at the beginning of the 1990s and then fell once again into deep anxiety, this time about the imminence of global heating. We have plenty of other things to worry about now but, whatever it is that we choose to worry about, we have evidence enough that we are currently in the midst of an era of ecological crisis and psychological incoherence, and our leaders – global and national – seem to be unable to address the crisis effectively. On top of all this, the explosion of information and communications technology over the past

two decades means that we can no longer escape knowledge of incompetence and corruption among the leaders we depend on to avert the catastrophe.

One aspect of this psychological incoherence is our unwillingness to see that in a complex, dynamic organic system such as the one of which we are part, all the elements – economic, political, cultural, social, environmental, psychological – are interconnected. The paradox in all of this is that, though we are well aware of these dangers, we do almost nothing to confront them. We are constantly flooded with information telling us how bad it is. We have known for decades that the resources of the planet are running out, yet this information has minimal impact on behavior. We do little in our daily lives to address the crisis, and attempts to confront it at a global level meet with staunch resistance. Indeed, our political masters keep expressing their delight at rising production and consumption, when rising production and consumption are what is killing us. We are caught in the growth trap. Keep growing and we die. Stop growing and we die.

Even if we could stop growing, even if we could suddenly stop polluting our soil, air and water, stop the emission of greenhouse gases, stop consuming more of the planet's resources than we can replace, would it save us? James Lovelock (2009) argues that the best we can do is learn to adapt to a changed planet. When a smoker finds that he has terminal lung cancer he may stop smoking at once, but it won't cure him.

Why are we so unaffected by the prospect of catastrophe? Why are we so incongruent, denying both our intuitions and the evidence of our senses? Why, to cite Rogers (1957), is there "a fundamental discrepancy between the experienced meaning of [our] situation as it registers in [our] organism and the symbolic representation of that experience in awareness" (p. 222). Why do we do nothing, or at least so little that it will make no difference? The stresses on our planet and our personal and collective pathology are deeply connected. We are crippled by an anxiety of which we pretend to be unaware. Evolutionary adaptation has prepared us to respond to threat instinctively by fighting, fleeing or freezing. It worked for us in the Stone Age but it doesn't work for us now.

Our response to crisis appears to be largely a reactive one. Confusion is simplified and identity is sustained by collectively employing our psychological defences: denial, projection, fixation, displacement, dissociation, splitting and psychic numbing. These defences may help us to avoid being traumatized by the horror of our situation, but they only make the crisis worse. When we experience the anxiety aroused by an uncertain future, we are as likely to engage in "retail therapy" as in environmental activism. We may tell ourselves we are not anxious, but deep down we know better.

I suggest that a great deal of what our clients bring to us is symptom, and that patching up symptoms is not what person-centered therapists do. We may listen with deep empathy and find that our clients' "presenting problems" are but a surface manifestation of their discomfort with their current way of being. Many of them are under the impression that there is something wrong with them which needs to be fixed. Maybe what needs to be fixed is the culture in which they feel uncomfortable. James Hillman's comment is pertinent here:

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 apperceptions of our intra-subjective selves. My practice tells me that I can no longer distinguish clearly between neuroses of self and neuroses of world. (Hillman, 1982, p. 72)

Unfortunately there are many who have no sense of anxiety at living in a toxic culture. To quote R. D. Laing:

Only by the most outrageous violation of ourselves have we achieved our capacity to live in relative adjustment to a civilization driven to its own destruction. (Laing, 1967, p. 64)

If the conditions of worth imposed by society support adjustment to a toxic and self-destructive culture, we need to broaden our concept of congruence in our discussions of the process and outcomes of therapy. Congruence for us and our clients requires opening ourselves to the fullness of our experience and being aware of the dissonance between our experience and both our personal and cultural conditions of worth.

Organismic anxiety

Carl Rogers (1980) argued in *A way of being* that our becoming is not only individual but is an element in the becoming of the universe. Such a notion fits within the picture of an organic, emerging universe – a picture which is being taken more and more seriously by science. Rogers observed the materialistic–mechanistic–reductionist paradigm of the clockwork universe being challenged by the paradigm of the organic universe, a challenge in which he was happy to join. It is important to note that Rogers' formulation of the notion of the formative tendency was not an isolated or odd idea. It belongs to a world-view which has an honourable history and a complex contemporary expression. In 1980 he was taking his place in a group of key intellectuals who were reviving the notion of an organic universe, a notion which had been suppressed by conventional science. Rogers could find plenty of support in contemporary science and philosophy for the view that the universe is not a machine but an organism of which we are a part (see Birch & Cobb, 1981; Capra, 1983; Lovelock, 1979; Naess, 1973; Prigogine, 1980; Sheldrake, 1981).

Rogers was seriously committed to the notion that human beings are living, growing and choosing – a notion which is either totally obvious or totally incredible according to our view of what kind of universe this is. Behind his observation of a “directional tendency” is an understanding of a universe which is alive and directional. “Becoming” is not just a characteristic of human beings or, indeed, of all human life, rather it is a feature of the universe as a whole. There is, he asserts, “a formative tendency at work in the universe, which can be observed at every level” (Rogers, 1980, p. 124). Our personal growth is to be seen within the context of this larger, universal formative tendency, “a tendency which pervades all organic life – a tendency to become all the complexity of which the organism is capable” (Rogers, 1980, p. 134).

The emergence of the person-centered approach within the individualistic culture of North America ensured that in its conventional expressions person-centered theory has maintained an individualistic notion of the self. Critical psychologists in recent years have pointed out that this narrow definition of the self has produced a narrow definition of mental health (Hepburn & Jackson, 2009; Parker, 1997; Teo, 2009). We might add that a consequence of this, in person-centered theory, is a narrow definition of congruence. It goes to the heart of our understanding of what it means to “be that self which one truly is.”

In *On becoming a person* Rogers (1961) refers to the therapist's “accurate matching of experience with awareness” (p. 282). In *A way of being* (Rogers, 1980) he writes of “a close matching... between what is being experienced at the gut level, what is present in awareness, and what is expressed to the client” (p. 116). However, when we read this

statement in the context of the book in which it occurs, it is clear that “what is experienced at gut level” is not limited to the organism’s response to information received through the senses. On the one hand, he affirms the reality of the nonsensory connections between individuals which are apparent in such phenomena as premonition and remote sensing. On the other hand, he points to evidence that in certain circumstances “persons feel they are in touch with, and grasp the meaning of, this evolutionary flow. They experience it as tending towards the transcending experience of unity.... The person feels at one with the cosmos” and refers to his own experiences as a therapist when “our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger” (p. 129).

The Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess argued that we have too restricted a notion of the self:

Human nature is such that with sufficient all-sided maturity we cannot avoid ‘identifying’ our self with all living beings, beautiful and ugly, big or small, sentient or not (Naess, 1995, p. 13).

Self-realization for Naess is the broadening and deepening of the notion of “self” to achieve as wide an identification with the world as possible. The same thinking is echoed in the writing of many contemporary ecopsychologists (Fisher, 2002; Kidner, 2001; Roszak, 1992), ecophilosophers (Abram, 1997; de Quincey, 2005; Mathews, 1991)) and complexity theorists (Kauffman, 2008; Laszlo, 2003) who argue that human beings are so entirely entangled in the world that the sense of individuality may well be labelled delusional. They variously acknowledge the influence on their thinking of Spinoza, Einstein, Bateson, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Whitehead and, more often than not, refer to Buddhist philosophy.

Heidegger (1978), for instance, challenged the commonsense assumptions on which most counselling is based. He argued that the “self” as we commonly understand it is a fallacious idea. He wrote of “being-in-the-world” as a unitary phenomenon. There is no meaningful distinction that can be made between self and the world. Self-world is one concept, one reality.

Ecophilosophers such as Arne Naess have challenged the individualistic and anthropocentric assumptions on which most therapies are based. They do not perceive a boundary of “difference” between humans and the rest of the planet. In such a perspective, adequate human functioning demands a congruence not just between one’s behavior and one’s self-concept, or between one’s self-concept and one’s “real self,” but a congruence between one’s way of being and nature. The planet is a living organism of which we are a part. Our self-realization is the self-realization of a larger self.

Rogers makes it clear in *A way of being* that his thinking about the person-centered approach needs to be put in a broader context. Behind his observation of a “directional tendency” is a particular understanding of the universe. He places his formulation of the actualizing tendency within the context of a universe which is organic, alive, emergent and directional. If we accept this notion, we might consider that not only do we participate in the “creative advance” (Whitehead’s expression) of the universe but we experience, with or without awareness, the collective anxiety of all living beings, all organic life.

Rogers’ thinking in his final book is entirely consistent with “the new scientific worldview” described by complexity theorist Stuart Kauffman:

We live in an emergent universe of ceaseless creativity in which life, agency, meaning, consciousness and ethics..... have emerged. Our entire historical development as a species,

our diverse cultures, and our embedded historicity, have been self-consistent, co-constructing, involving, emergent, and unpredictable. Our histories, inventions, ideas, and actions are also parts of the creative universe. (Kauffman, 2008, p. 231)

Rollo May (1977) follows Kierkegaard in proposing that our existential anxiety arises from the struggle between actuality and potentiality in our personal experience.

There is anxiety in any actualising of possibility. To Kierkegaard, the more possibility (creativity) an individual has, the more potential anxiety he has at the same time. Possibility ('I can') passes over into actuality, but the intermediate determinant is anxiety. (May, 1977, p. 27)

We might argue that our species is involved in the same struggle between potentiality and actuality and that our vulnerability to the collective anxiety of humanity is the consequence.

Kierkegaard argued that our capacity for anxiety is a blessing. Those who have no awareness of their anxiety are stuck in it, and being stuck in it is misery. The counsellor's awareness of her own enmeshment in the collective anxiety of humanity is a condition of her clients' insight into their own anxiety, an insight which Kierkegaard suggests is necessary if they are to cease wasting their lives.

To be that self which one truly is

In Rogers later writings, becoming "that self which one truly is" – an expression he borrowed from Kierkegaard – is not something we do, not even something that happens to us as individuals. It is an evolutionary process in which our being and becoming are embedded.

It originally made sense for Rogers to theorize about the process of therapy from the perspective of the individual's experience, subjectivity and self-actualization. In his essay on Ellen West, he comments on the suffering which is a consequence of the tension between our attempts to live up to other people's expectations and our experience – our deep, and maybe inarticulate, sense of who we are, for:

the experiencing organism senses one meaning in experience, but the conscious self clings rigidly to another, since that is the way it has found love and acceptance from others. (West, 1980, p. 165)

Here Rogers was thinking of the individual trying vainly to live up to "conditions of worth" imposed by family and social context, conditions which are antagonistic to the "self" which is trying to actualize. However, if we take Rogers seriously in his theorizing of the formative tendency and his understanding of "self" as process, congruence becomes more than the integration of experience, awareness and communication in an individual. Both we and our clients need to be congruent not only in thinking and feeling and behavior, and not only within our own organism. We need also to be congruent with what we call the "natural world." The "person who we truly are" is in an intimate relationship with all living beings. If our relationship with the natural world, experienced in our organismic felt sense, is denied to an awareness shaped by an individualistic culture, we are "anxious or vulnerable to anxiety."

"Becoming" is a central notion in Rogers' understanding of congruence. "Becoming" has no place in a mechanistic paradigm. It belongs in the organic paradigm which was the

ultimate ground of Rogers' theorizing. For Rogers (1980, p. 123), the basis of all motivation is "the organismic tendency toward fulfilment". "The universe", he says, "is always building and creating as well is deteriorating. This process is evident in human beings, too" (Rogers, 1980, p. 127). Congruence, then, involves openness to one's own becoming, not simply to one's current state of being. It involves openness to process, creativity, emergence, the evolutionary flow. The fully functioning person, that is to say the congruent person, is aware of:

The ongoing flow of feelings, emotions, and physiological reactions that he or she senses from within. The greater this awareness, the more surely the person will float in a direction consonant with the directional evolutionary flow. (Rogers, 1980, p.127).

Schopenhauer (1958) argued that self-centeredness is a prison to be avoided at all costs. We need to commune with the collective spirit and thus be released from the unending cycle which is always wanting more. For Schopenhauer, our sense of individuality is an illusion. There are no things in themselves, only a single thing in itself. From this perspective, the "natural" way to live is to feel and show real empathy for others, since this is the only way to free oneself from the sufferings that arise from self-preoccupation. Not that it makes much difference to anything. The flow of Schopenhauer's universe is blind, purposeless, and uncontrollable.

This is clearly not how Carl Rogers imagines the universe. For Rogers, like Whitehead, Bergson and contemporary complexity theorists such as Prigogine or Kauffman human creativity has its source in the creative evolution of the universe. As individuals and as a species we are potentially moving "in the direction of wholeness, integration, a unified life... in this larger, creative, formative tendency" (Rogers, 1980, p.128) or, as Kauffman (2008, p. 232) puts it, collectively "living with the creativity in the universe that we partially co-create".

This persistent becoming of culture, science, the economy, knowing, doing, and inventing is the ever building result of ourselves as full humans.... I hope that we will see ourselves in the world in a single framework of our entire humanity that spans all human life, knowing, doing, understanding, and inventing. The word we need for how we live our lives is *faith*, bigger by far than knowing or reckoning. A committed courage to get on with life anyway. (Kauffman, 2008, p. 244)

Ecocentric congruence

We are ready enough to accept that the separation of mind and body is pathological. We need to be equally aware of the deep pathology that has come from the modernist separation of culture and nature. The incongruence between who we as individuals have learned that we are and who our total organisms know that we are can be understood as a manifestation of the incongruence between our culture and nature.

Rogers suggests that "persons of tomorrow" – presumably excluding *incongruent* persons of tomorrow – feel "a closeness to, and a caring for, elemental nature. They are ecologically minded, and they get their pleasure from an alliance with the forces of nature, rather than in the conquest of nature" (Rogers, 1980, p. 351). We can set this notion next to E.O. Wilson's "biophilia hypothesis." In *Biophilia*, Wilson (1984) argued that we have evolved to feel kinship not only with other humans but with all organic life. To distance ourselves from nature is to act in a way contrary to what evolutionary process has long ago made essential to our humanity. He suggested that:

... to explore and affiliate with life is a deepened complicated process in mental development. To an extent still undervalued in philosophy and religion, our existence depends on this propensity, our spirit is woven from it, hope arises from its currents. (Wilson, 1984, Prologue)

Wilson was writing from the perspective of an evolutionary biologist. However, support for his argument is provided by a wealth of recent research on the association between contact with nature and psychological well-being (Chalquist, 2007; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kidner, 2001; Maller et al., 2005; Snell, 2012). An argument first proposed by Roszak (1992) and often repeated in the ecopsychological literature would have it that urbanization, which represents the split between subjective experience and nature, is not only environmentally destructive, but contrary to our evolutionary context. Beneath our surface adaptation to modern life is a biological and psychological discomfort.

We might imagine an ideal world in which there is no conflict between the actualizing 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. Unfortunately, in the world which shapes our introjected conditions of worth there are aspects of culture which are an impediment to the individual's proper relationship to the planet. In such a world, the ecologically sensitive 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 their awareness and as they find the feelings which are congruent with their organismic experiencing, they will be reborn as the person they "naturally" are, someone whose freedom and autonomy are totally compatible with the nature of the larger world. Within an acceptant, empathic, non-judgemental relationship the client becomes increasingly congruent as he or she finds a balance between conditions of worth and organismic experiencing. This implies avoiding on the one hand the loss of their individual identity and on the other hand the loss of their connection with nature in a deluded sense of individuality.

Conclusion

Client-centred therapy works at the client's point of discomfort, the point of incongruence between the client's organismic experiencing and his or her symbolization of this experiencing. Moving towards congruence starts with allowing this sense of discomfort to come into awareness. What we hear our clients saying when they articulate their discomfort is shaped by the perspective we bring to the interaction.

When a client complains about her husband's dominating behavior and illustrates it with an anecdote about his insistence on how and where they live, we may hear it either as a statement about their relationship or as a statement about her unease at being unable to find a satisfying connection with the natural world. When a client expresses concern about committing his mother to a nursing home against her objections, we may hear it as a statement of his filial guilt or as an expression of his existential fear of death and dying. When a client expresses how depressed she is we can hear this not simply as a personal statement about dissatisfaction with her life but as an indication of her sensitivity the collective, barely articulated struggle of our species to match our performance with our potential. The adolescent's self-harm, suicidal fantasies or psychic numbing may have their source in the ecological, rather than the personal, dimensions of existence. The deeply congruent therapist will be listening.

I have suggested above that congruence involves experiencing who we really are. If we are congruent, authentically ourselves, we will be creatively anxious, sensitive to the

human situation and stirred to move onward. I have suggested that if we deny our experience of who we really are we will be incongruently anxious. There is no escape from anxiety. We should acknowledge Kierkegaard's insight that not only is the experience of anxiety integral to being human but it is this experience which prompts us to move towards becoming all that we can be and doing what we need to do. It was clear enough to Rogers that both the means and end of therapy is congruence, not contentment. If we and our clients allow ourselves to experience and acknowledge the discomfort of rigidly denying who we are, we will be able to move from incongruent anxiety to congruent anxiety and begin to experience the full complexity of our being.

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