

# INTRODUCTION

## THE CONFERENCE

This book is a selection of papers from an international conference held at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England in July 2004. The conference theme was 'the spiritual dimension in therapy and experiential exploration' and it was advertised as a gathering for 'counsellors, psychotherapists and other professionals concerned to explore the significance of spirituality in their life and practice'. We had initially expected that the conference might attract seventy or eighty people, but we eventually achieved the maximum numbers we could accommodate and the attendance was over one hundred and fifty.

The contributors to the conference came from many countries, mainly the UK and mainland Europe, but there were also delegates from as far afield as Japan and the US, and from different spiritual and therapeutic allegiances. The Christian tradition was the spiritual tradition most strongly represented and the person-centred approach the most widely represented in terms of therapeutic orientation.

It is hard to convey a felt sense of the conference solely in the printed word. Along with versions of the papers collected here (and many others) there were sessions devoted to Hawaiian Kahuna dance, poetry reading, expressive arts, experiencing through doodling, 'godly play', and the therapeutic power of ritual in psychotherapy. The conference was designed to reach deeply not only into the philosophical and theoretical aspects, but also into the lived experiencing of 'the spiritual dimension'. A number of delegates began each day with Sōtō Zen Buddhist meditation; others attended Christian Eucharist in the University Chaplaincy. It was our aim to enable participants to feel physically nurtured and 'held' so that, free as far as possible from practical concerns, they would be able to give themselves over to individual experiencing and be open to the sense of 'interconnectedness' that can develop in large groups when there is a collective openness to self and other.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In our compilation of material from the conference we have been limited in a number of ways. The Christian tradition is strongly represented and the Humanist view explored

in some depth in the final section of the book, but, apart from Reverend Daishin Morgan's keynote address which explores the Buddhist perspective, none of the other major faiths is represented, although some papers and workshops acknowledge the influence and importance of other Eastern traditions, and Buddhism was much more strongly represented at the conference itself. Within psychotherapy, the person-centred approach is most strongly represented in the book, although at the conference there were significant inputs from cognitive-behavioural and psychodynamic practitioners. The book is based on papers that were offered and accepted for publication. Some presentations that we would have liked to include were not available for publication; others were not recorded in such a form as would lend themselves to adaptation for the purposes of this book. We are fortunate to have the input of several philosophers, whose contribution is invaluable in terms of opening up new ways of thinking.

The conference structure involved keynote speeches and invited addresses, as well as submitted papers and experiential workshops. We have retained the keynote addresses as a separate section, the first of the book, and they are here presented in alphabetic order of author. We have structured the rest of the book in terms of broad fields of interest: 'Philosophy', 'Presence and the Core Conditions', 'Christian Perspectives' and 'Humanism'. There were many possible ways of organizing the material; we have chosen a particular structure, but we would encourage readers to explore connections *between* the various sections as well as within them. For example, the theme of 'presence' appears in many of the presentations besides those that appear in the 'Presence' section; an exploration of language is a striking feature of several of the papers, and writers again and again make it clear that spiritual experiencing often cannot be expressed adequately in words. It is in acknowledgement of the importance of 'wordless' expression that we took the decision to represent some of the experiential sessions in the 'Personal Reflections and Workshops' section. We were strongly encouraged in this respect by Tess Sturrock, one of the workshop presenters, and it is to Tess that we owe the inspiration of the 'pink page', the decision to include illustrations of some of the artwork that was produced during the conference, and the cover design of the book.

Each of the six sections of the book begins with a brief introduction to the individual papers or workshops in which we endeavour to draw out some key points. In the rest of this general introduction we will consider briefly some recent definitions of 'spirituality' and draw out some of the main threads to emerge in the book as a whole. Each writer or presenter has struggled with their own thoughts or experiencing around the nature of the theory or practice of spirituality, but the collective expression of these reflections leads to the emergence of common themes that offer ways forward not only for a deeper appreciation of spirituality in relation to counselling, but for our understanding of how we may live meaningfully as human beings.

One theme that follows from the changed social context in which we now live our spiritual experiencing is the wide range of spiritual traditions available to us at the start of the twenty-first century. The theme of the adequacy or inadequacy of language to express spiritual experience recurs in several of the presentations, and related to this is the theme of how religious language functions, and also the theme of mysticism in

religious thought. Other themes are the question of the 'self' and whether the self is viewed differently in therapeutic as contrasted with spiritual traditions. This leads to consideration of the interconnectedness of people, both with each other and with the larger world. The thinking of Carl Rogers features strongly in many of the presentations, and the final section in this general introduction is devoted to looking at some aspects of how spirituality has come to be regarded, specifically within the person-centred approach.

### WHAT IS 'SPIRITUALITY'?

Western culture is no longer strongly identified with its Christian roots and individuals are now free to choose their own path towards what expresses their deepest longings to find a 'home' in what Richard Holloway terms a world of 'humanistic homelessness', characterized by 'religion without religion' (p. 23). With so many options to choose from in this 'homeless' world the term 'spirituality' has come to replace 'religion' in a way that would simply not happen in a culture such as that of Saudi Arabia, where all aspects of daily life are regulated by a shared Islamic faith (Al-Bahadel, 2004).

Edward Bailey has noted that a significant change in the public attitude towards 'spirituality' occurred in British culture in the 1970s. He observes that terms such as 'pastoral', 'myth' and 'spiritual' became 'no longer seen as purely religious' and began to be appropriated into secular society to the extent that today the 'spiritual' aim of education is now monitored in schools and the 'spiritual needs' of patients are considered in the provision of health care (1999: 1). The shift of spirituality from being seen in terms of the secular rather than the religious he identifies as being part of a broader social trend 'from the (self-styled) rational to the emotional, from the intellectual to the intuitive, from the mechanical to the mythical, from formula to fable' (1999: 2). Bailey points out that this shift raises many difficult questions for organized religion. It also leaves individuals in confusion as to where and with whom spiritual issues should be raised: with the priest, the minister or with the teacher, the health worker, or the counsellor? Some of the issues arising from the overlap of traditional pastoral care within the religious context and counselling as a secular activity are explored later in this book in the dialogue between Chris Jenkins and William West and in the research into differing perceptions of a Christian counselling centre presented by Jack Earl.

In their recent sociological study of the community of Kendal in Cumbria, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005) link contemporary talk of spirituality with what they call the 'massive subjective turn of modern culture'. It is, they write:

a turn away from life lived in terms of external or 'objective' roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences (relational as much as individualistic) ... the turn is away from worlds in which people think of themselves first and foremost as belonging to established and 'given' orders of things. (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005: 2-3)

Heelas and Woodhead associate the term 'religion' with established orders of things, with scriptures, dogmas, rituals and so on, and 'spirituality' with those new forms which connect primarily with subjective experience. There is a huge variety of these latter forms. Amongst the groups and activities surveyed in Kendal were aromatherapy, astrology, circle dancing, craniosacral therapy, energy management workshops, healing, kinaesiology, massage, meridian therapy, paganism, rebirthing, reiki, Sai Baba teachings, Taizé singing, Tarot card reading, a wild women group, and yoga. That each of these may be defined as 'spiritual' points to one of the central problems that we face in addressing this area of human experiencing: it is only subjectively meaningful and can easily be dismissed by those who have not shared such experiencing or give credibility to the particular framework within which it occurs. The term 'spiritual' is both too broad and too vague and yet, in the West, we no longer inhabit a cultural framework that will permit a general use of the word 'religious' to capture the nature of experiencing that contributors to this book are seeking to express. A century ago William James (1902) endeavoured to capture something essential within the variety of what he then termed 'religious' experience; today, despite its negative connotations for many through its association with New Ageism, the term that best fits the general area under consideration in this book, and the one we have chosen to use, is 'spirituality'.

## THE VARIETY OF TRADITIONS AND THE LANGUAGE OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCING

Holloway, from a Christian perspective and van IJssel from a Humanist perspective, draw attention to the wide range of spiritual traditions which are open to us today. Our 'postmodern' situation is one in which we can draw significantly not just on traditions such as Christianity or psychoanalysis, but also on Native American culture, Islam, Indian and Chinese traditions, spiritual paths growing out of the cultures of Africa and South America, together with a huge range of more recent 'New Age' traditions, such as those described by Heelas and Woodhead in the preceding section. This is a relatively new situation, though not one that is entirely unprecedented. There have been earlier times when a whole range of different spiritual paths were open to people. For example in Hellenistic Alexandria could be found followers of the ancient Egyptian religion, Christians, Jews, Gnostics and Stoics. At times such as these, it would seem that there is the need for an acceptance of the reality that there are many valid paths, but also the need for attention to individual experiencing, for it is to that to which one must turn in choosing between the various paths and authorities which present themselves.

The nature of experiencing that underlies the spiritual quest is a 'longing', a theme touched on by several authors and most fully explored by Mary Hill and Suzanne Keys in their workshop, 'Longing in Practice: Prayer and Therapy'. But what is this longing?

I long for God, but does that longing come from within me or is it sparked by God's longing for me? Am I longing for or in response to? The answer is that it has to be both. This longing comes from deep within me as well as in response to a calling from without. (Keys & Hill: 183, this volume)

Discursive language cannot fully capture the quality of 'longing', nor of 'wonder', another term that appears in some of the more personal accounts of individual experiencing of spiritual openness. Such experiences are more likely to be communicated through metaphor, in poetry, for example, or in scripture. Mary Green and Stephen Platten explore, through a variety of individual experiences, what is, in effect, an elaborated metaphor of the cathedral as 'a route to God'.

All this points to a central difficulty we encounter when trying to describe spiritual experiencing: that it always contains more than can be expressed. It is helpful in this respect to consider the central argument of Jon Sharp's paper 'Towards a Phenomenology of the Divine', which is that we are capable of receiving direct experiencing, including experiencing of a spiritual nature, through our senses, unmediated by language or social context. Such experiences can only be received and not explained, either they are 'known' to us or not 'known'. Paradoxically, they also often involve, as many presenters observe, being in a state of 'unknowing', a state which finds its best-known metaphorical expression in the medieval text, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anon, 2001). As Peter Schmid observes:

We cannot think or talk 'about' God; any endeavour to do so can only be an attempt to 'ask and think towards' God ... in other words, to seek God. Any conversation about God is more wrong than right or it is only analogous, i.e. similar, illustrative, metaphoric, symbolic. (Schmid: 228, this volume)

Each tradition has its own language, its own ways of expressing what it takes to be true and valid in the spiritual sphere. But what can be expressed in language has often been held to be less important than the 'unknown' or the inexpressible. This is the theme of mysticism, which is explicitly addressed by Ellingham and Sharp. The conceptual forms of the different traditions may be less important than the lived experiencing which we try to formulate, and our lived experiencing may in the end be the only means we have of assessing the validity of competing traditions. This theme of language and its relation to the non-linguistic is addressed in three of the philosophical papers (Ellingham, Schneider and Sharp), but is also raised in a more down-to-earth context by Earl (p. 291), and approached in a different way again by Luczaj. Both Schneider and Earl draw on Wittgenstein's view that 'language only has meaning in the stream of life'. From that point of view it is misleading to think of language as primarily labelling objects in the world; instead we need to understand how linguistic expressions work in practice. It is also important to acknowledge, as Schneider points out, that the language of spirituality, because of the elusive nature of spiritual experiencing, is, and will always be, 'a language for "insiders"' (p. 63).

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE 'SELF'

An important theme running through many of the papers is that of 'the self'. Some of the participants suggest that there can be a tension between therapeutic positions which take an affirming or 'positive' view of the self, and encourage people to 'be themselves' or 'find themselves', and spiritual positions which take an apparently 'negative' view of the self, encouraging a 'transcending' or 'dissolving' of the self.

Speaking from the Buddhist perspective, Daishin Morgan begins his address by saying: 'Therapy and religion seem to me to be part of one continuum, yet their aims may not be the same'. He explains that the 'aim of Buddhism is enlightenment', which he defines as follows:

Enlightenment is coming to see things as they are without the overlays that result from experiencing the world from the perspective of a separate self ....  
Enlightenment can be summarized as the release from our own greed, anger and delusion that can happen when we come to know our true nature.  
(Morgan: 26, this volume)

At the therapeutic end of the continuum the aim is to come to know and accept the self as it is in order to live more effectively. In terms of the presentations gathered in this book, differing attitudes to the self appear, reflecting different points on the continuum, as one might expect given the conference theme.

On perusing the various contributions we find at the 'self-acceptance' end of the spectrum:

**van Blarikom's** view (p. 257, quoting Rogers and Kierkegaard): one needs to 'will to be that self which one truly is';

**Thorne's** view (p. 44) of 'the unremitting task of seeking to embrace and then to hold on to so profound a level of self-acceptance that I am no longer a problem to myself';

**Leonardi's** person-centred view of the importance of self-actualization and self-acceptance (p. 206);

**van Kalmthout's** account (p. 156) of 'one's own inner appreciation of oneself'.

A rather different view of this layer of self is, however, given by Luczaj (p. 139), speaking from her experience of facilitating creative writing, she remarks that 'attempts at accurate "self-expression" have cathartic value for the writer, but do not tend to open out for others, and create new meanings .... The kind of poetry I refer to, however, relies on the assumption of a fixed, authentic self.'

At the other end of the spectrum we find the following references to a point at which the known or 'fixed' self dissolves:

**Morgan** (p. 27) speaks of 'an encounter or realization of one's true nature. It is a meeting in which one's self, as one believes oneself to be, falls away';

**van Kalmthout** (p. 158) says: ‘When we discard this self-structure we indeed enter a deeper layer of experiencing ... The discarding of the self-structure is described in some religious or spiritual circles by “the transcendence of the self” or “the dissolution of the ego”’;

**Thorne** (p. 44), continuing the sentence quoted earlier, speaks of ‘... so profound a level of self-acceptance that I am no longer a problem to myself and can therefore be utterly self-forgetful’;

**Ellingham** (p. 89), quoting Underhill, suggests that in mysticism the self needs to be ‘remade, transformed’;

**Nimetz** (p. 149) suggests that ‘The “I” transforms itself into something beyond itself which is its non-existence as I know it when I live within duality/separation’;

**Scott** suggests (p. 197) that ‘... in our depths all is positive ... this constitutes our intact, essential self, our *being* which is a concrete reality that we can access in ourselves, and which is an autonomous centre’.

Several of the participants comment on the tension between these attitudes to the self:

**Leonardi** (p. 206) distinguishes a sense of deeper self from ego, linking the ego with the structures set up by introjected values;

**Morgan** says (pp. 26, 27) that we need to get away from ‘the perspective of a separate self ... There is this great need to know the true self, yet to find it one must let go of the self’;

**Ellingham** (p. 84) quotes Underhill’s view of the mystical position in which ‘the pure soul’ is one ‘from which ... all the beams and motes of egotism and prejudice have been removed’;

**Thorne** (p. 44) remarks: ‘This is a self-love which is the very contrary of selfishness’;

**van Kalmthout** says (p. 156): ‘The true self points to an inner, unconditioned dimension of existence that stands in opposition to an outer, conditioned dimension that is sometimes referred to as the false self’ and adds (p. 158) that ‘the term “true self” is nothing more than a pointer ...’.

A broad consensus could be seen to emerge from all this. We might say that human beings range from being relatively fixed, structure-bound, prejudiced, conditioned, separated from others and the world, to being relatively flowing, open, unprejudiced, unconditioned, self-giving and open to others and the world. Where therapists *value* ‘the self’ they are usually valuing the person as a free, changing, interactional being who is able to let go of fixed ways of thinking and being. When they appear to *devalue* ‘the self’ they are usually devaluing those aspects of the person which have become rigid, closed to experience, separated from others. Those aspects they may call ‘the ego’, and it can be said that, in the course of therapeutic or spiritual development, if the person stays with acceptance of what is and then lets go of that (as opposed to clinging to any ‘current’ version of the self), the ego is gradually ‘dissolved’ or ‘transcended’. The person is then open to what is ‘unconditioned’ within them, to a transcendent or spiritual dimension of existence.

If we adopt this kind of position then we are seeing the self as an interactional process rather than as any kind of *thing*. In this connection Ellingham (p. 96) refers to Whitehead's philosophy in which 'we view ourselves as process immersed in process beyond ourselves'. We become more 'thing-like' as we lose our sense of our interconnection with others and with the world. The ego is then a reification or solidification of the self, a falling of that which is beyond forms into the realm of the formed.

Yet we need to bear in mind the kind of warning which Schmid issues in connection with overbalancing in favour of the *multum* over the *unum*. Schmid acknowledges that the *unum* (the individual) has its own specific value, just as has the *multum* (the interactional community). It is important to value what *is* valuable in the ego. The ego with its logic, structures, concepts and linguistic forms is not necessarily at odds with the interactional flow of the self. As Luczaj (p. 140) puts it, drawing on Gendlin's philosophy, 'the forms require attention, and effort to maintain, and they are needed in order for us to think'. The forms (words, logic, structure, theories, models, formulations ...) may *further* the interactional flow rather than block it, as when the words of a poem carry us deeper into our experiencing, or when a therapist's formulation of a client's situation elicits the response 'Yes, that's exactly it!', or when a scientist hits on just the right model—such as the DNA double helix—which will explain the data.

It is not the forms that create the difficulties, but our rigid holding to the forms. Mountford (p. 108) draws attention to Rogers' remark that theories should be thought of as 'gossamer threads' which we weave around our experiencing, not as iron-clad structures which imprison that experiencing. If 'ego-self' refers to our tendency to hold rigidly to our ways of seeing things, then the ego-self needs to be transcended or dissolved. But that does not mean there is no place left for language or conceptual structures. Rather, in the words of Master Shen Yeng, quoted by Luczaj (p. 140) 'it is not like monism, is not like a big cosmic ONE where there is no duality at all, no more difference at all. It is just the realization that all individualities are interdependent, empty of *inherent* existence' (our emphasis).

It is important to recognize the fact that the egocentric self is not 'the enemy' of the fluid, open 'self as process'. Gradual acceptance of the egocentric self and self-knowledge are vital to the spiritual path and this is where therapy and religion meet. Self-knowledge, acceptance of 'what *is*' is vital both to emotional well-being and to spiritual growth.

This brings us to the importance of being fully present to oneself and others. On a personal basis this means that we need to accept who we are without distortion, accepting all that is there, not judging, not blaming. Being present to 'what is' can be developed by different means: by participating in an encounter group (Prüller-Jagenteufel); through spiritual practice (Prüller-Jagenteufel and others); through the repeated experience of listening with the whole of one's being to individuals in therapy or groups (Carl Rogers, see p. 10 below); through the experience of childbirth (Iseli Schudel); through the practice of meditation (Morgan). The current interest in 'mindfulness' as a psychological therapy (e.g. Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002) is

based on a recognition that being fully present to ‘what is’ in the present moment can reduce anxiety and help individuals who are severely depressed. It is through the act of being present to ourselves that we may become open to a sense of something more, whether it be ‘a profound sense of totality and connectedness’ (Sharp: 68), a deep appreciation of the Trinity and of our participation in ‘God as group’ (Schmid: 228ff), the ‘lost dimension’ of ourselves (van Kalmthout: 156), the non-human world (Mountford: 101), a realization of ‘the emptiness of things’ (Morgan: 28). Seeking more than ‘what is’ blocks the openness that comes, paradoxically and inexplicably, from simply being present. Therapeutically, this paradox is clear: ‘... only what is allowed to be, can change’ (Prüller-Jagenteufel: 126), but it also has implications for spiritual practice: one presenter comments on the significance of the name of God in the Jewish tradition—‘Yahwe’, ‘the one who is present’ (Prüller-Jagenteufel: 123), another on the Kabbalistic title of the Godhead on the Tree of Life—‘*Eheieh* which translates as “I am that which is”’ (Sharp: 78). Wherever one is in terms of the therapy–religion continuum, or however one regards ‘the self’, the value of acceptance of ‘what is’ is a unifying theme.

## CARL ROGERS AND THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH

As mentioned above, the thinking of Carl Rogers was prominent in the conference papers. His ‘core conditions’ of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy are explored throughout the book in a rich variety of contexts. Van Kalmthout argues that each of the conditions has a spiritual aspect; Hitchcock relates them to a series of Christian metaphors; Leonardi sees them as leading to an emptying of self that is characteristic of both Buddhism and mystical Christianity; Mountford extends them to the non-human world. In a sense, the core conditions represent an ‘ideal’ way of being that in itself may, for some, including it would seem Carl Rogers himself, constitute the beginning of a spiritual path.

As is well known, Rogers himself had ambivalent feelings about religion. It is to the more negative connotations of the word that he refers in his statement, quoted by Martin van Kalmthout, ‘I am too religious to be religious ... I have my own spirituality’ (Baldwin & Satir, 1987: 35; p. 155, this volume).

The person-centred approach, for some, including van Kalmthout, offers ‘a system of meaning’ (van Kalmthout, 2004 and p. 155, this volume). This is not surprising. It is a carefully researched therapeutic orientation, based on meticulous observation of the human being over many years. It is undoubtedly the case that it expresses many truths about humanity that are easily demonstrable in practice (for example, if the core conditions are offered a person will grow and change). Carl Rogers never ceased observing human beings and, in his later years in particular, extended this observation to himself, reaching an understanding of the spiritual nature of existence that it is difficult to comprehend with the thinking mind alone. Brian Thorne claims that ‘Fifty years from now it is likely that Rogers will be remembered ... as a psychologist whose work made

it possible for men and women to apprehend spiritual reality' (Thorne, 1992: 105–6). It is certainly true for many individuals that the self-exploration encouraged by their experience of person-centred counselling has led to the opening up of an inner world that may be regarded as partaking something of a spiritual reality.

When Thorne describes 'the practice of person-centred therapy [as] a profound spiritual discipline' (2002: ix; quoted in Ellingham, p. 88) he is saying something important about the nature of spiritual practice, a point drawn out by Ivan Ellingham where he quotes Rogers on his method of working with individuals:

I let myself go into the immediacy of the relationship where it is my total organism which takes over and is sensitive to the relationship, not simply my consciousness. I am not consciously responding in a planful or analytic way, but simply react in an unreflective way, my reaction being based (but not consciously) on the total organismic sensitivity to this other person. (Rogers, 1967: 202; quoted p. 88, this volume)

Ellingham points out that Rogers' ability to focus his attention at this deep level is the result of many years of disciplined professional practice. This is not a religious discipline, but one that partakes of aspects of a religious discipline. Here we have a glimpse of the path, a very important insight when we bear in mind that so much attention is focused on the apparently 'spiritual' place where Rogers eventually arrived rather than how he actually got there. This statement demonstrates, in effect, how Rogers seems to have developed his own ability to be present to 'what is' (see above; p. 88 this volume).

This view is corroborated by Jan van Blarikom, who demonstrates how the particular nature of Carl Rogers' Protestant upbringing imbued him with certain values that are integral to the person-centred approach. Van Blarikom writes:

The reformed-Christian character of Rogers' upbringing is voiced in his work through his emphasis on realness. 'To be who you really are', that is Rogers' credo; his belief in man as he really is ... His concept of realness is an appeal for presence: an appeal to be there for the other as you really are. (van Blarikom: 260, this volume)

It was towards the end of his life, after many years of developing his ability to be present, that Carl Rogers writes what is probably his best-known pronouncement on the spiritual dimension:

When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or as a therapist, I discover another characteristic. I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then simply my *presence* is releasing and helpful to the other. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be

close to the transcendental core of me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviors turn out to be *right*, in some odd way: it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present. (Rogers, 1980: 129; original emphasis)

This very personal statement clearly strikes a chord in many and will be found repeated several times in the course of this book. An error into which one may easily fall, however, is that of seeking ‘presence’ as a goal or as a ‘fourth condition’. In a late interview, quoted by Geller and Greenberg, Rogers returns to what may happen in an interaction when he is fully present:

I am inclined to think that in my writing I have stressed too much the three basic conditions (congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding). Perhaps it is something around the edges of those conditions that is really the most important element of therapy—when my self is very clearly, obviously present. (Baldwin, 2000: 30; quoted in Geller & Greenberg, 2002: 73)

Geller and Greenberg cite this as an example of Rogers’ view of the healing quality of ‘presence’, but the nouns that Rogers uses are, in fact, ‘something (around the edges)’ and the ‘self’. What we suggest Rogers is saying here is that ‘something around the edges’ enters the interaction as a source of growth or healing *when* his ‘self’ is fully present. It is not simply his presence that is healing: it is *what comes* when he is present to himself and to the other. Rogers’ language both here and in his earlier statement is hesitant—‘when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me ...’, ‘when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness ...’, ‘it seems that my inner spirit has reached out ...’, ‘[p]erhaps it is something around the edges ...’—and characteristic of articulations of religious experience as described by Hans Schneider (see Chapter 4, pp. 50–64). The danger, Schneider makes clear, in terms of all spiritual experiencing, lies in applying an ‘over-belief’ to what is emergent in terms of spiritual awareness that loses the quality of the original experience. For Rogers and his followers, the ‘over-belief’ is likely to be expressed in terms of the theory that underpins the person-centred approach and it is tempting to think in terms of a ‘fourth condition’, be it ‘presence’ or, as Brian Thorne has differently expressed his own version of this quality of experiencing, ‘tenderness’ (Thorne, 1985; see also pp. 37, 38 and 39, this volume).

Rogers is saying nothing more than that if he is fully present to himself and the other then ‘something’ may happen ‘around the edges’. This is the case for all of us. The papers in this book represent a rich cross-fertilization of exploration of this ‘around the edges’ territory.

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