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## Dr. Rogers and The Moral Umbrella

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# Dr. Rogers and The Moral Umbrella (Open-Centred Ecosophy)

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## Heaven wasn't made for dogs

It began with Mac-the-dog, and if it didn't *quite* begin with Mac, he is an important and early symptom.

Mac died. That was not problematic in itself. He was an old dog, and I knew old creatures die. The problem was my stepmother-to-be's attempt to teach me about heaven. Heaven *sounded* wonderful: *Mac will be there!* But I hadn't understood properly: *Only people go to heaven, Clive. Mac was a dog. Dogs don't have souls, so they don't go to heaven.*

I didn't say much, but I thought a lot. People were *in*; dogs were *out*. To a four-year-old boy, that was clearly ridiculous. If I had a "soul", then so did Mac. There isn't that much difference between a four-year-old boy and a dog.

I held my peace about "in" and "out" for the next 12 years, then I remember becoming very interested in cows: *Why was it okay—morally acceptable even—to slaughter cows, but wrong—under most circumstances—to kill a human being?* Nobody seemed able to answer in

any way that made sense. This was a puzzle I wasn't going to solve just yet, and I held my peace again.

I didn't know it of course, but I was worrying about a question central to moral philosophy: *What is "in", and what is "out"?* Any system of morality offers *protection* to a particular group or class of things. We cannot treat *those* things just any old how. There are rules, or obligations, or perhaps consequences to worry about when our actions affect them. Members of that group are morally important and significant in themselves. They are "in", and everything else is "out". Sometimes we say that such things have value in themselves.

However we put it, things which are "in" are sheltered by what I call "the moral umbrella". So there is a question which every body of moral commitment and belief must answer: *How big is the moral umbrella? What kinds of things belong beneath its shelter?*

According to my stepmother and the church to which she belonged, dogs don't belong beneath the moral umbrella, at least not as full and proper members. According to most of the people I knew as a teenager, cows don't really belong there either. This is unsurprising. Traditional morality—even at its most generous—has only sheltered other human beings. At *best*, humans are "in"; everything else is "out". At worst...well, the classical Greeks who got European moral philosophy off the ground weren't particularly generous. Barbarians, the inhabitants of other Greek cities, and perhaps women, don't seem to have belonged beneath the same moral umbrella as a fully paid up Athenian male. When I consider current US foreign policy, I'm not so sure things have changed.

As I said, my young self was unaware of all this. I did not know I trod an existing path—albeit overgrown with a few weeds—a path that was soon

to support many new footsteps. You see, the assumption that morality's concern is limited to human beings had already been found wanting by the Victorian utilitarian philosophers. They argued that *any* creature capable of experiencing pleasure and pain was morally important, and this, of course, meant a much bigger moral umbrella because it isn't just humans who experience pleasure and pain. Their case was persuasive, but it seems to have generated little popular interest until the 1970s. Then Geoffrey Warnock gave the by now rather dusty moral umbrella a good airing. So far as I know, he was the first to explicitly *ask* the moral umbrella question. Like his forebears, Warnock answered in terms of sentience, or roughly the capacity to feel pleasure and pain, and he was soon followed by the Australian philosopher Peter Singer who picked up the baton and began to campaign in the name of "animal rights". That campaign remains on-growing.

I don't know whether the *zeitgeist* has a quirky sense of humour, or if it relishes irony; however, just as these Victorian blueprints for moral expansion were finally gaining public attention, Arne Naess—the father of deep ecology—and several other philosophers began protesting that a moral umbrella restricted to sentient creatures is absurdly and unconscionably *small*. Arguments for the inclusion of *flora* as well as sentient *fauna*, and for the inclusion of rivers, mountains, and other environmental fixtures were published pretty much alongside renascent pleas for the moral enfranchisement of sentient creatures which had lain dormant for a century. This is where I become personally involved again, but first I need to revisit the little boy whose best friend was a Scottish Terrier.

## How congruence can cost one dearly

Mac-the-dog befriended me after my mother died, and I moved in with my grandmother. He was a cranky old dog; he bit everyone except my grandmother and me, but he was the only person who seemed to know how to relate to me, and he was certainly the only person able to follow the wandering child I became. We had intimate knowledge of my grandfather's garden, the golf course, the local rubbish dump with its rats, and broken tiles, and utterly tempting pools of tar, and we patrolled miles of roads and streets. We explored wherever our short legs would take us.

Mac was my companion, my comforter, but he wasn't my only companion and comfort. With sky above me, and especially with growing things around me, I felt safe and held. I might have lost my human mother, but it seemed that so long as I could escape from human beings and the strange, enclosed places they chose to live in, I could experience a larger, nonhuman, but still loving mother. In consequence, I grew up and matured into adulthood never doubting that *flora* as well as *fauna*, and later rivers, mountains, and other environmental fixtures were morally significant just like human beings are. I wasn't unaware, though; I knew that my view of matters was not widely shared. What I didn't know was how deep and potentially vicious the disagreement was.

Not long after the moral umbrella became an active philosophical issue again, I was back at University as a graduate student in philosophy whose doctoral supervisor had unexpectedly retired. I needed a new supervisor, and therefore I needed a new topic. I took a step which I do not recommend to any grad student: I chose to hold my peace no longer. In counselling terms, I guess I opted for congruence. In academic terms, I set

about exploring the arguments for moral expansion and making a case for something as close to deep ecology as I could get. The job ate 10 years.

I don't think I ever lost sight of my objective, and I know I never stopped thinking about it for long, but I spent much of my grad student decade teaching and pursuing entirely different interests. That was because I was working against a seemingly impenetrable supposition that morality's proper concern is with other humans, and—if we *must* be consistent—with those other creatures capable of suffering similar to ours...*but perhaps there aren't very many of them...* This view, which I call "moral humanism", has been accepted for so long that it is as apparent to most academics as water is to the fish who swim in it. It is pervasive throughout such disciplines as economics, politics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and so on. I could not have imagined how entrenched the orthodoxy was, and I could endure only limited exposure to it.

Eventually, I did develop the argument I sought on the back of mounting evidence that human activity is changing the environment in ways which are going to harm us. If you are thinking that proposition remains unproven, the only people still arguing against it seem to have suspiciously vested interests in the *status quo*. Anyway, humankind is like an extended family living in an inherited mansion somewhere in the northern latitudes, I said, and some of us have decided to chop great big holes in the roof. When winter comes, we shall be in big trouble; we must *do something* about the hole-choppers.

Physical intervention aside, broadly two things can be *said* to those who are doing the chopping. First, it can be explained that this is not *sensible* behaviour. Self (or species) interest says, *Don't do that!* Second, it can be argued that the mansion is morally important in itself, it belongs beneath

the moral umbrella, and any self-respecting moral agent should be preserving it.

The first thing that can be said—I call it the "Captain Sensible" approach—is pretty much what one encounters in popular "debate". The second thing that can be said—which I call the "Agent Sage" approach—is favoured by environmental philosophers, deep ecologists, ecofeminists, and some natural scientists. *But how does one make it stick?* If it is generally accepted that morality's purpose is limited to protecting and fostering the well-being of human beings—and, with a stretch, other creatures capable of similar suffering—how can one mount a persuasive argument for a moral umbrella sheltering trees, plankton, mountains, and perhaps the entire ecosphere?

I begin with character assassination. You see Captain Sensible suffers from ailments which his friends prefer not to talk about. To begin with, there is no evidence that humans are *capable* of acting in their own long-term best interests environmentally speaking. We want wealth, economic growth, knowledge, as many toys as possible; we want them now. We sail as close to the wind as we think we can; we take risks. My hunch is that humans are wired that way. Speaking for myself, I delight in risks which make no rational sense.

To make matters even worse, the calculations that Captain Sensible would need to make are beyond human competence in practice and probably in theory. We often don't know what consequences small changes and seemingly innocuous activities might have, and that is not just a matter of remediable ignorance. Complex, chaotic systems are involved, and it may be that they cannot be accurately modelled. The best thing we can do is adopt a morality and a moral umbrella which will provide a large safety margin, and protect Earth and ourselves from ourselves. That

makes it possible to construct a simple but cunning four step introduction to something much like deep ecology:

- First, accept the mainstream "humans only" view of the moral umbrella.
- Second, recognise that humans *do* depend upon a quite particular environment; we *are* fragile; there *is good enough reason* to believe we are endangering that environment; and we are *not Sensible*.
- Third, moral theory is tailor-made to deal with this situation because we can now stand back from all moral beliefs and commitments and ask what human morality would *need to be like to best promote human welfare*. This is taking what the trade calls a *meta-ethical* view of morality, and it is consistent with the traditional claim that morality's *raison d'être* is human welfare. Conveniently though, it is also open to the conclusion that *promoting human welfare requires a radically expanded moral umbrella and a morality which, paradoxically perhaps, no longer places human welfare at its centre*.
- Four, descend from these dizzy heights and conscientiously set about following the new, reconstructed morality.

In other words—and I am leaving most of the detail out of account—a traditional, anthropocentric view of morality's concerns, plus a realistic assessment of humankind's present predicament and our needs as a species, furnish a powerful argument for *renouncing* the traditional moral umbrella and moving in the direction of a very expansive moral umbrella. As a bonus, and with an eye to the ancient practice of brokering a marriage with which to end longstanding dispute, this argument weds Captain Sensible (who is concerned with human welfare, and guides our

meta-ethical deliberations) to Agent Sage (who is the bearer of that generously opened moral umbrella the argument delivers).

I tell my students that this is "philosophical judo", and I call the consequent position "deep humanism". It has been recognised by deep ecologists as an alternative point of entry to their programme.

However—and in moral philosophy there is usually “however”—there is a rather large and embarrassing question outstanding: *How does one develop a particular kind of moral commitment? How does one learn to relate to the nonhuman world as something worthy of moral consideration?* I know what happened to me, but it probably isn't replicable, and it certainly wouldn't be kind to try experimenting. In 1994, I concluded work on deep humanism by making a few noises about education and the benefits of getting young children involved in gardening, and I began to think about training as a person-centred therapist. It seemed to me that only crazy people chop holes in their own roof, and I wanted to understand what could be making human beings so crazy. To my surprise, I discovered an answer to that large and embarrassing question, and it is that answer which is the point of all this.

## **Not an article of faith but a theory to tune-up**

The argument I have presented so far is a response to moral humanists, to those who think morality is only properly concerned with human beings. However—and here is yet another "however"—it is of little relevance to someone *already* persuaded that morality is much more generous than that, and it is liable to dismissal on the ground that nothing *substantial* is said about how a person *could* change their moral outlook and commitments.

What I want to do now is explain, in outline, how one's moral outlook and commitments *might* be changed, or further developed and supported. That *does* have relevance for someone whose moral umbrella is already well expanded, and it *does* respond to the critic who says, *Show me how!* My focus of attention will shift from philosophical theory to counselling and person-centred theory, and I feel that I must acknowledge I now run the risk of causing offence to people I would, overall, prefer not to offend.

There is a sentiment amongst practitioners that "person-centred" goes hand-in-hand with Carl Rogers's formulation of six "necessary and sufficient conditions" that must be met in order for there to be therapeutic personality change. For example, in its requirements for entry to the list of person-centred counsellors, the British Association for the Person-Centred Approach has come close to making this statement an article of faith. However, and without intending any disrespect to Carl, taken at face value, the necessary and sufficient conditions claim is absurd.

*Necessary and sufficient* means *if and only if*, and even hard science is leery of claims that strong. A useful hypothesis needs to be strong enough that it can be shown false; if not, it is scientifically valueless. It does not need to be so strong that it is almost certain to be false.

I am not the first to think these things, and I am not the first to make public noises. Campbell Purton has argued powerfully and elegantly that the necessity and sufficiency statement is a step too far. As Campbell points out, it seems to rest on the additional hypothesis that all psychic distress is rooted in introjections of conditional acceptance, those ubiquitous "I will love you if..." clauses that litter most inner landscapes and human relationships. They are usually, but not necessarily, experienced in childhood, and they are something most of us experience to some degree. The conditions Carl Rogers posited as necessary and

sufficient for healing are then the unique antidote to our wounding experience. Unfortunately for this line of thought, it doesn't seem to be the case that conditional acceptance *is* the aetiology of everything that brings clients to therapy. Campbell cites other common factors such as post-traumatic stress, lose-lose choices, bereavement, and childhood deprivation rather than *conditionality*.

Campbell is on to something. My sense is that what he is onto is no less than a need to revision the client/person-centred tradition for the 21st Century. I say *re-vision* not replace, or lose, or throw out with a little old-fashioned bath water. What is more, re-visioning is integral to the spirit of that tradition. Explaining his own view of science and theory, Carl Rogers described “the network of gossamer threads” which comprised psychoanalytical theory and wrote of the damage caused by Freud’s “insecure disciples” when they turned gossamer into “iron chains of dogma”. In the spirit of that metaphor, I shall map out a little revisioning which converges with my environmental agenda. I shall begin by taking three related steps.

- First, it is important to remember that the therapeutic way of being which characterises client/person-centred practice predates the theory. Client-centred therapy was around long before those gossamer threads woven to explain its efficacy, and it is *that therapy's way of being*, not any particular theorisation, which is the heart of the tradition. Although interesting and important, theory is an inescapably flawed attempt to enunciate—and provide a doorway into—a logically and existentially prior body of practice.
- Second, once shorn of their claim to absolute sovereignty, the therapeutic conditions enunciated by Carl Rogers still remain an

insightful way to conceptualise the client/person-centred way of being, and their practice remains a useful way to begin acquiring it.

- Third, once the theory is held lightly enough, and in the spirit of the moral umbrella question, it becomes possible and reasonable to ask whether the way of being is anthropocentric in its focus or potentially more generous. Client-centred and person-centred therapies are anthropocentric because they seek to help wounded human-beings, but *What about the way of being itself, is it necessarily anthropocentric?* One way of seeking an answer is to try to answer a further but more precise question: *Do the six therapeutic conditions map onto a nonhuman locus of attention?*

## **The locus of attention is waiting to open**

In sketching an answer to that question, I'm going to look briefly at each of the six conditions described by Carl, but I won't be discussing them in their original order.

The unconditional positive regard, or UPR, the prizing or love which a therapist offers their client, maps onto trees, cats, mountains...without difficulty. It is easy to love a tree; sometimes, it is easier than loving human beings, I find.

Empathy, too, is not that difficult to extend to most living things. Cats have feelings, purposes, furry cat-shoes to step into. This may be called "anthropomorphizing", but I don't think we need be put off because anthropomorphizing is a respectable ethological tactic these days. What is more, empathising with members of another species is not restricted to human beings. The primatologist Frans de Waal has recently described how a female bonobo rescued a stunned starling, climbed a tree in order to

release the bird to its own element, and, when the starling failed to escape the bonobo's enclosure, sat beside it for the rest of the day while it recovered the strength to fly away.

Trees may seem a bit harder to empathise with, but I think most gardeners know empathy for their floral friends. Mountains? Speaking personally, I feel things for mountains that are sometimes overwhelming, and the well-being of a beloved mountain is of great importance to me. I'm not alone, and I can even call recent developments in neuroscience to my aid. Let us think about those developments for a few minutes.

The experience of empathy is associated with observable brain activity and a kind of neurological mirroring. For example, if I see you drop a big rock on your foot, things will happen in parts of *my* brain that mirror what is happening in those parts of *your* brain. Not everything that is going on for you will be mirrored, that is why I don't literally feel your pain; what I will experience are the emotions, expectations, and other less direct feelings associated with a big rock landing on one's foot.

Furthermore, some researchers think that human brains have evolved areas dedicated to empathic identification. In other words, humans and perhaps to a lesser degree several other kinds of mammal are hardwired to "do empathy".

Of course, this is empathising with other humans...but wait for it. Brain scanning has demonstrated that the same kind of activity occurs when, for example, we observe a big rock dropping on a cow's hoof, or—and this may surprise some folks—we watch a big rock rolling down a mountainside and slamming into a second big rock. It seems that humans are not just wired for empathy; we are so *well* wired for empathy that we are able to empathize with inanimate objects.

UPR, empathy...that's two out of the three *core* or *counsellor* conditions, the oft-cited keystone of person-centred being. The other condition is that the therapist be congruent, or genuine and authentic, within the counselling relationship. Can genuineness and authenticity be offered to a nonhuman? I think the answer is, *Of course it can*, but this probably only applies to creatures enjoying a high degree of sentience.

However, there are two stages to congruence. First, there is openness to one's own experiencing, a kind of inner honesty and acceptance. Second, there is congruent relating and being in the world. The first stage is about how one relates to one's self, and the second stage is about relating to others. Even if one cannot easily be said to be in congruent relationship with a mountain, one can be congruently oneself upon the mountain and act towards the mountain from a place of personal congruence. The more I reflect upon this, the more it seems potentially very important to the way we treat the nonhuman world, and I shall be returning to a closely related theme at the end of this discussion. To conclude the present discussion of congruence, I shall simply note that the three counsellor conditions are *inseparable* in practice: one cannot be empathic and acceptant while holding back on congruence.

I now want to turn the traditional account of the counsellor conditions on its head for a few paragraphs. They are intended to contribute to a therapeutic environment promoting growth and psychic healing in human beings. They are there for the sake of the client. But they do affect the counsellor as well.

Routinely seeking to offer the counsellor conditions to others changes the person who is making that offer. At least, that is my experience, and I think I see the same thing in my colleagues and students. Speaking personally, I find that the changes run in two directions. I am more

acceptant, a little less ego-laden, gentler, more perceptive, more empathic, more desirous that whatever is gets its moment in the sun, its chance to flourish. I am also more angry, more enraged by the suffering and damage which humankind is causing to itself and everything around it. Both these tendencies, if generalized, will help safeguard Earth from human depredation and foolishness. Therefore, it begins to seem to me that offering, non-anthropocentric, counsellor conditions to the nonhuman world is not only possible, doing so will tend to promote personal changes which will contribute to environmental sanity.

Carl Rogers stated six therapeutic conditions, and I have now described how three of them—the *counsellor* or *core* conditions—might apply to a nonhuman locus of attention. That leaves three to go.

Contact, psychological contact, was the first of these. The therapist needs to work at that, and I see no harm and much good in a genuine attempt to be in contact with the nonhuman. I don't mean that we should get silly; we just need to notice the way the leaves move, the paws go down; put ourselves in the way of experiencing rain against the cheek; be open to the other, the nonhuman other, in a way analogous to the openness of a counsellor to their client.

Condition number two was that the client be anxious, vulnerable, incongruent. *Does it map at all?* In a way, I think it does. Earth and everything on it is vulnerable, much more vulnerable than humans ever imagined until recently. We need to be aware of that, I think, and hold it in awareness.

The really tough condition is the last one: “the client *perceives*, at least to a minimal degree...the *unconditional positive regard*...and the *empathic* understanding of the therapist.” With highly sentient creatures, both are

possible, and I don't mean only those creatures which have evolved alongside us as dogs and cats have. Try walking in the Canadian bush, in moose country, without a gun and without any ill intent towards moose. They abound. Take a gun and go look for dinner. *Where are the moose?* It may be said that moose just know what guns are, but I remember meeting a mother moose with her little one when I was lost and on a very narrow lakeside trail. Mother moose with their young are dangerous. I forgot that in my delight at meeting Mistress Moose that afternoon. We stopped, and gazed, and I felt her lack of ill intent towards me as I think she felt mine. We both moved aside a little, and we passed beside each other on that narrow trail.

Can vegetative lives somehow experience or otherwise be affected by our intent, our feelings towards them? There is some positive evidence—try routinely saying ugly, negative things to a plant, and see what happens—and science is interested in this matter. As for the rest of creation, how much do we really know?

In sum, I am suggesting that Carl Rogers's therapeutic conditions can be read as a recipe for a way of being with the nonhuman world, with Earth's other creatures and living things, with her bones and substance. That will serve the cause of environmental sanity in two ways. It will tend to change how humans relate to and behave towards the nonhuman. It will tend to change humans in ways which will make us better suited to live as citizens of an ecological community.

So where does all this leave the moral umbrella I once so badly wanted to expand and my deep humanist programme of personal and moral change? If I temporarily set aside precise and formal statements of the therapeutic conditions, and I think more generally about the way of being they generate, it seems to me that, as a therapist, what I offer to a new client is

genuineness, acceptance, absence of judgement, and a willingness to really try to understand what it is like being them. Over time, and as I give my close attention to the client, I find warmth, tenderness, and a deep desire for their well-being has grown within me. I am inclined to think that is just how it is to be human. If we offer this stuff, and if we attend, a kind of love takes root within us, and I can find no reason why the offering, and the attending, should not be to the whole of what some call *the created order*. In time, a kind of love will take root inside one if it is not there already, and then there will be no doubt that it all belongs beneath the moral umbrella and warrants our consideration.

In a way, that writes *finis* to a personal story that started fifty years ago. If we will only *notice* and remain relatively open and non-judgemental, what we will then experience answers or even obviates the moral umbrella question. By force of circumstances, I guess, noticing and being open was where I began.

I say that writes *finis*; however, I am not yet quite done. Like Pyramus in the play within a play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I intend to end by stages, and the first of those stages will take me out onto a branch which feels even younger and thinner than those I've climbed so far.

I spoke earlier of Campbell Purton's thoughts on necessary and sufficient conditions, and the clients who do not seem to fit person-centred orthodoxy. My hunch is that there is still a useful generalization about clients which can be made: *Every* client who benefits from client/person-centred therapy arrives impaired in their ability to accept and to relate. The aetiology of impairment may vary, but what hurts us does not. We fail to accept our own experiencing; we fail to accept ourselves; we fail to accept others. Therefore relationship fails. At the heart of current environmental problems, I think I perceive similar failure. We really are

star-dust; we really are children of a planet that is fecund, beautiful, and mostly well-disposed towards us. We really are amazing creatures. We really seem unable to accept any of it. Therefore, we need therapy, and we need to change our way of relating to ourselves, each other, and the world about us. We need therapy, and we need an ethic much like that inherent in the client/person-centred tradition when the locus of attention is opened.

## **How not to be so dumb**

When I began drafting an earlier version of these ideas, I was unable to do so until I allowed myself to write with several different voices. Here, I have made myself speak with what is almost one voice, but that has not been easy; at times it has felt inauthentic and as though part of me is being strangled. Am I just in need of therapy—yet again—or is something of more general interest afoot?

For comfort, I seem to need a minimum of three voices. There is a cerebral, educated voice: the voice of argument and reason. There is a more passionate, inward, and personal voice: the voice of feeling, of experiencing, and sometimes need. There is a kind of commentary voice that breaks in and notices things the other voices are close to and may not quite have in focus. Without access to all three, I lose my fluidity.

I have a way of explaining this: the division represented by my voices is not innately *mine*; it is an introject from a culture grounded in dissociation. My professional life and my personal search for understanding have involved exploring at length and in depth aspects of being which are routinely separated, and from whose vantage points people view each other with suspicion. On the one hand, to "do philosophy"—or engage in most academically respectable tasks—one must

set aside and even deny whatever is not resolutely cerebral. On the other hand, to offer a healing, therapeutic relationship to clients; to engage in spiritual practice; and—I would argue—to enjoy relationship of any kind, one must engage with the inward and the personal.

Academic, professional, and personal credibility attach to skilful and consistent denial of personal experiencing; honour and financial rewards usually accrue to the most cerebral voices. In this way, integration is discouraged, and the paradigm "rational person" becomes a study in dissociation. In some quarters, however, the valuing system is reversed. Logic and reason are viewed with mistrust, and emoting is celebrated. Counselling and counsellor-training sometimes offer examples of this.

If I am right, then our culture is sick: we tend either to lead with our heads, which is surely not what heads evolved for; or we lead with our hearts, which is usually a disaster. The client/person-centred tradition can in part be seen as a response to this sickness, and it has evolved at least two ways of working with the dichotomy I describe.

Carl Rogers's colleague Eugene Gendlin continues to develop a means of bringing what he calls the "felt sense" into awareness. The felt sense is kind of difficult to explain but much easier to demonstrate. For most people, most of the time, it is experienced as an initially unclear and under defined awareness located between the throat and the abdomen. Pay it gentle attention, and it resolves into a kind of clear and certain knowing which feels entirely trustworthy. The felt sense isn't, for example, going to answer questions like, *Is there life on Mars?* But it can answer such questions as, *What do I need in order to feel okay right now?* or, *What is it I'm experiencing when I reach for the battery produced eggs on the supermarket shelf because they are cheaper than the free range eggs?* Personally, I find that it can also answer seemingly more cerebral

questions like, *What is this argument missing that makes it seem incomplete?* In other words, Gendlin offers a way of bringing into full awareness what is currently on or even over our personal "awareness horizon". To a similar end, I understand, but using different means, there is André Rochais's *Personality and Human Relations* (PRH).

These days, when I teach philosophy, I encourage my students to work from their felt sense of the issues. The idea is not to ignore their cerebral talents and emotional responses, but to let those things serve rather than lead. As students get the hang of what I am proposing, they write more fluently and more creatively, and many seem to grow in ways which surprise them. Campbell Purton—whom I mentioned earlier—is teaching ways of accessing and working with the felt sense to trainee counsellors at the University of East Anglia, and I am doing the same at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College. We both find that many students gain a way of knowing their experience—and therefore the world around them—which profoundly changes their lives and therapeutic practice. My hunch is that if and when enough people are living in awareness of their felt sense—whether conceptualised that way or not—then issues like the moral umbrella question, too, will take on a whole new aspect.

If that sounds a bit abstract and even unlikely, ask what kind of a dwelling place most people seem to choose given opportunity. *Does it have a garden? Does it involve living creatures other than humans? Does it contain indoor plants? Why?* What is it we know about ourselves and our own well-being and deny to our full awareness in the name of...*What?...* reason, material security, prudence...? Stupidity?

If that seems a harsh note to finally end on, I lost my human mother through incompetence and because not enough attention was paid to her

when she needed it. I found another kind of mother, and now she is in dire trouble thanks to human activity and because not enough attention is being paid to her. It is almost beyond bearing.

## Notes

### Heaven wasn't made for dogs

The Victorian philosophers I have in mind are Jeremy Bentham (1748) who famously asserted, “The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but Can they *suffer*?”, and John Stuart Mill. Geoffrey Warnock dusted things off in 1971 with *The Object of Morality*.

In April 1973, both Peter Singer’s article “Animal Liberation” and Arne Naess’s “The Shallow And The Deep, Long–Range Ecology Movement: A Summary” were published. Singer’s article should not be confused with his later (1977) book of the same name. A translation of Naess’s book length exposition was eventually published under the editorship of Rothenburg (1989).

To the best of my knowledge, the terms "moral umbrella" and "moral humanism" first appear in Mountford (1995).

### Not an article of faith but a theory to tune-up

Carl Rogers’s necessary and sufficient conditions first appeared in Rogers (1957) reprinted in Kirschenbaum (1990). They re-appear in Rogers (1959) which is now out of print and hard to obtain. Kirschenbaum (1990) contains an edited version, but personally I think it is worth the effort to secure a copy of the larger and more elegant original. The comments about “gossamer threads” appear on page 191 of Rogers (1959).

Campbell Purton's ideas first appear as "Person-Centred therapy without the core conditions" in Purton (2002), and are now more fully explicated in Purton (2004); see particularly pages 39-41.

### **The locus of attention is waiting to open**

I am not alone in thinking that the person-centred way of being is appropriate to a nonhuman locus of attention. For example, Brian Thorne notes the potential relevance of that way of being to our environmental ills in Thorne (2002) particularly chapter 5. My guess, though, is that I am the first to really try to spell out what might be involved in such a mapping.

Thorne (2002)—and again particularly chapter 5—also has interesting things to say regarding the way in which the acquisition of a person-centred way of being can become a personal and spiritual practice that changes the therapist.

The material I cite regarding science, bonobos, and empathy is taken from de Waal (2005), Phillips (2004), and Cohen (2004). It is all available on the *New Scientist* database accessible through the Internet.

Current scientific thought about the possible analogues of sentience and intelligence in plants can also be tracked through the pages and the online archive of *New Scientist*. The most recent article I have found is Phillips (2002).

### **How not to be so dumb**

The "earlier thoughts" which I mention formed a talk at "The Spiritual Dimension in Therapy and Experiential Exploration" Conference, University of East Anglia, 18-22 July 2004, and are forthcoming as Mountford (forthcoming). This present paper was written for one voice in

order to be offered as the University of East Anglia Associates of the University Counselling Service 98<sup>th</sup> public lecture on 25 November 2005.

The most accessible book on focusing is Gendlin (1981). More depth and detail is to be found in Gendlin (1996). Campbell Purton (2004) is also a good place to start particularly for anyone interested in how focusing fits into the development of client/person-centred therapy.

A new and accessible introduction to PRH has recently been published (2004) although I think it fair to say that PRH must be experienced to be understood.

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