

Theologian meets Psychotherapist

Paul Tillich and Carl Rogers

It is a quarter of a century, this year, since the death of Paul Tillich, the Protestant theologian who has been called 'perhaps the principal moulder of modern Christian thought'. To mark this we are publishing here a transcript of the dialogue between him and Carl Rogers, the pioneer of person-centred psychotherapy, which took place at San Diego State College, California, on 7 March 1965 and was his last public appearance. The transcript, which was circulated (in a somewhat edited form) as a pamphlet by the College in 1966, is appearing in Carl Rogers: Dialogues, edited by Howard Kirschenbaum and Valerie Land Henderson and published by Constable of London, price £12.95 hardback, £7.95 paper.

Carl Rogers: The importance of self-affirmation: I think that would be one area where we agree. Then I have been much impressed with your thinking about the courage to *be*, because I see that in psychotherapy; the courage of being something, the risk that is involved in knowing. ... I've also liked your phrase about the antimoral act being one that contradicts the self-realisation of the individual, and it seems to me both of us are trying to push beyond some of the trends that are very prominent in the modern world; the logical positivistic, the ultrascientific approach, the stress of the mechanistic and highly deterministic point of view which, as I see it, makes man just an object trying to find some alternative stance in relation to life. I wonder if you feel that we're in some agreement on issues of that sort?

Paul Tillich: Yes, of course. In all these points I heartily agree, and I am very glad you enumerate them for me.

Rogers: Well, perhaps we could push into some areas where I am not quite so sure. I wonder what some of your views are about the nature of man. When I've been asked about that—I think some of the existentialists take the point of view that man really has no nature, but it seems to me that he has—I have taken the point of view that man belongs to a particular species. He has species characteristics. One of those, I think, being the fact that he is incurably social; I think he has a deep need for relationships. I think that simply because man is an organism he tends to be directional. He's moving in the direction of actualising himself. So, for myself, I really feel man does have a describable nature. I have been interested, for example, in the fact that you discuss the

demonic aspects of man. I don't know whether you see that as a part of his nature—at any rate I would be interested in your views in regard to the nature of man.

Tillich: Your question is very far-reaching and demands of me a little bit longer answer. The first point I want to make is that man, definitively, has a nature, and I think the best way to prove this is negatively, by showing how impossible the argument is if someone *denies* that man has a nature. I think of the famous French existentialist, Sartre, who has denied that man has a nature and has emphasised that man is everything he makes of himself and this is his freedom. But, if he says that this is man's freedom, to make himself, then this, of course, means that he has the nature of freedom, which other species do not have. To make such statements is somehow self-contradictory. Even if you attribute to man what medieval theology attributed to God, namely to be by himself, and not conditioned by anything else, even then you cannot escape the statement that man has a nature. Now that's my answer to the first element in your question, but there are two more and I want to get at them.

The second is that I distinguish, so to speak, two natures of man, or one which one rightly calls his nature and the other which is a mixture of accepting and distorting his true nature. The first one I would call, with a very vague term, his true nature, but to make it less vague I usually call it his *essential* nature. If I speak theologically, then I call it man's created nature, and you remember that this is one of the main points about which the early church was tremendously fighting—namely, that man's essential or created nature is good. According to the biblical word, 'God looked at everything he had created and behold! it was very good.' There is an even more philosophical, reformulated affirmation of this by Augustine, namely, *Esse qua esse bonum est*, which means in English, 'being as being is good.' Now that is what I would call man's essential nature and then, from this, we must distinguish man's existential nature, of which I would say it has a characteristic of being estranged from his true nature. Man, as he is in time and space, in biography and history, *this* man is not simply the opposite of man's essential nature, for then it wouldn't be man any longer. But his temporal, historical nature is a distortion of his essential nature, and in attempting to reach it, he may be contradicting his true nature. It is a tremendous mixture, and in order to understand the real human predicament, we must distinguish these two elements. I believe that in Freud, himself, and much Freudianism and psychotherapy generally, there is no clear distinction of these two points. This was your second element. Now shall I answer your third element also ...?

Rogers: First ... let me make one comment on this. I find in my work as a therapist that if I can create a climate of the utmost of freedom for the other individual, I can really trust the directions that he will move. That is, people sometimes say to me, 'What if you create a climate of

freedom? A man might use that freedom to become completely evil or antisocial.' I don't find that to be true, and this is one of the things that makes me feel that—I don't know whether this is essentially or existentially—in a relationship of real freedom the individual tends to move not only towards deeper self-understanding, but toward more social behaviour.

Tillich: Yes, now I would put a question mark to this, and I would say that first of all, who is free enough to create this situation of freedom for the others? And since I call this mixture of man's essential nature and his estranged nature ambiguous—the realm of the ambiguity of life—I would say under the condition of this ambiguity, nobody is able to create this sphere of freedom. But now let's suppose that it exists in some *other* way. I can come to this later when we speak of the demonic. Then I still would say the individual who lives in such a social group in which freedom is given to him remains an ambiguous mixture between essential and existential being. He is, as the English language expresses it beautifully, 'in a predicament,' and this predicament is a universal, tragic estrangement from one's true being. Therefore, I don't believe in the power of the individual to use his freedom in the way in which he should—namely, fulfilling one's own essential potentialities, or essentialities; these two words are here the same. So I am more sceptical, both about the creation of such a situation and about the individuals who are in such a situation.

Rogers: I would agree on the difficulty of creating complete freedom. I am sure none of us are ever able to really create that for another person in its completeness. ... Yet what impresses me is that even imperfect attempts to create a climate of freedom and acceptance and understanding seem to liberate the person to move toward really social goals. I wonder if it is your thinking about the demonic aspect that makes you put a question mark after that.

Tillich: Now, let me first answer you about what you just said, and here I would very much agree. I would say there are fragmentary actualisations in history and I agree especially with the deep insight we have gained, largely by psychotherapy, about the tremendous importance of love in earliest ages of the development of children. So the question would come here: 'Where are the forces which create a situation in which the child receives that love which gives him, later on, the freedom to face life and not to escape from life into neuroses and psychoses?' I leave that question open.

But now you are interested about the demonic, and you are not the only one. I myself was, and everybody is in some way, so let me say how I came to this concept. I wrote in the year 1926, when I was still professor at the University of Dresden in Germany, a little article, a little pamphlet, *The Demonic*, and the reason not to speak of the 'fallen' or the 'sinful men' or any of these phrases was that I saw from two points of view structures which are stronger than the good will of the individual, and one

of these structures was the neurotic-psychotic structure. I came into contact after the First World War, since 1920 about, with the psychoanalytical movement, coming from Freud at that time, and changing the climate of the whole century—already in Europe at that time. The second was the analysis of the conflicts of society by the Socialist movement and especially by the early writings of Karl Marx, and in both cases, I found a phenomenon for which these traditional terms, like ‘fallen men’ and ‘sinful men,’ are not sufficient. The only sufficient term I found was in the New Testament use of the term ‘demonic,’ which is in the stories about Jesus: similar to being possessed. That means a force, under a force, which is stronger than the individual good will. And so I used that term. Of course, I emphasised very much I don’t mean it in a mythological sense—as little demons or a personal Satan running around the world—but I mean it as structures which are ambiguous, both to a certain extent creative, but ultimately destructive. This is the reason why I introduced that term. So, instead of only speaking of estranged mankind, and not using the old terminology anyhow, I had to find a term which covers the transpersonal power which takes hold of men and of society; of men in stages, let’s say, of drunkenness, being a drunkard, and not being able to overcome it, or producing a society in which either class conflicts or as today in the whole world, conflicts of great ideologies, of great forms of political faiths which struggle with each other—and every step to overcome them has usually the consequence of driving the people more deeply into them. Now this is what I meant with the demonic. So I hope I made one thing clear: that I don’t mean it in the old mythological sense which of course has to be demythologised.

Rogers: ... And certainly when I look at some of the things going on in the world from the power point of view and so on, I can see why you might think in terms of demonic structures.

I’d like to talk a little bit about the way I see this matter of alienation and estrangement. It seems to me that the infant is not estranged from himself. To me it seems that the infant is a whole and integrated organism, gradually individual, and that the estrangement that occurs is one that he learns—that in order to preserve the love of others, parents usually, he takes into himself as something he has experienced for himself, the judgements of his parents: just like the small boy who has been rebuked for pulling his sister’s hair goes around saying, ‘bad boy, bad boy.’ Meanwhile he is pulling her hair again. In other words, he has interjected the notion that he is bad, where actually he is enjoying the experience, and it is this estrangement between what he is experiencing and the concepts he links up with what he is experiencing that seems to me to constitute the basic estrangement. I don’t know whether you want to comment on that ...

Tillich: Yes; because the infant is a very important problem; I call this in philosophical or, better, psychological terms, the mythological state of Adam and Eve before the Fall; dreaming innocence. It has not yet reached reality; it is still dreaming. Of course, this also is a symbol, but it is a

symbol which is nearer to our psychological language than the Fall of Adam and Eve, but it means the same thing, and it means that Adam, namely men—the Hebrew 'Adam' means men—that men, every man, is in the process of transition from dreaming innocence to conscious self-actualisation, and in this process the estrangement also takes place, as well as the fulfilment; therefore, my concept of ambiguity. I agree with you that there is also, in what the parents used to call 'bad boy' or 'bad girl', there is also a necessary act of self-fulfilment, but there is also something asocial in it, because it hurts his sister and so it has to be repressed, and whether we say 'bad boy', or prevent it in any other way, this is equally necessary, and these experiences mean for me the slow process of transition of dreaming innocence into self-actualisation on the one side and self-estrangement on the other side, and these two acts are ambiguously intermixed. Now that would be about my interpretation of the situation of the infants.

Rogers: Well, there is much in that that I would agree with. I'd like to say a little bit about the kind of relationship in which I think man's estrangement can be healed, as I see it from my own experience. For example, when we talk about—when either of us talks about the courage to be or the tendency to become oneself, I feel that perhaps that can only be fully achieved in a relationship. Perhaps the best example of what I am talking about is that I believe that the person can only accept the unacceptable in himself when he is in a close relationship in which he experiences acceptance. This, I think, is a large share of what constitutes psychotherapy—that the individual finds that the feelings he has been ashamed of or that he has been unable to admit into his awareness, that those can be accepted by another person, so then he becomes able to accept them as a part of himself. I don't know too much of your thinking about interpersonal relationships, but I wonder how that sounds to you.

Tillich: I believe that you are absolutely right in saying that the man-to-man experience of forgiveness, or better, acceptance of the unacceptable, is a very necessary precondition for self-affirmation. And you cannot forgive yourself, you cannot accept yourself. If you look in the spiritual mirror, then you are much more prone to hate yourself and to be disgusted with yourself. So I believe that all forms of confessional in the churches and the confessions between friends and married people—and now the sacroanalytic confession of one's deeper levels which are opened up by the analyst—that without these things, there is no possibility of experiencing something which belongs ultimately to another dimension: the dimension of the ultimate, let me call it preliminarily. But I would say, with you, only the right acceptance is the medium through which it is necessary men have to go—from men to men—before the dimension of the ultimate is possible. I may add here that I have not used often anymore the word 'forgiveness', because this often produces a bad superiority in him who forgives and the humiliation of him who is forgiven. Therefore, I prefer the concept of acceptance. If you accept this acceptance, then I think I can

170

confess that I have learned it from psychoanalysis. I have learned to translate an ideological concept which doesn't communicate any longer and replaced it by the way in which the psychoanalyst accepts his patients: not judging him, not telling him first he should be good, otherwise I cannot accept you, but accepting him just because he is not good, but he has something within himself that wants to be good.

Rogers: Certainly, in my own experience, the potency of acceptance of another person has been demonstrated time and time again, when an individual feels that he is both fully accepted in all that he has been able to express and yet prized as a person. This has a very potent influence on his life and on his behaviour.

Tillich: Yes, now I believe that this is really the centre of what we call the 'good news' in the Christian message.

Intermission

Tillich: The minister, who represents the ultimate meaning of life, can have much skill unconsciously, although he is unskilled, but even then he should not establish himself as a second-rate psychotherapist. Now that seems to me a very important rule. Otherwise, cooperation would soon end in little catastrophes and would come to an end altogether.

Rogers: Well, that sort of sets off in me a somewhat deeper question. I realise very well that I and many other therapists are interested in the kind of issues that involve the religious worker and the theologian, and yet, for myself, I prefer to put my thinking on those issues in humanistic terms, or to attack those issues through the channels of scientific investigation. I guess I have some real sympathy for the modern view that is sort of symbolised in the phrase that 'God is dead'; that is, that religion no longer *does* speak to people in the modern world, and I would be interested in knowing why you tend to put your thinking—which certainly is very congenial to that of a number of psychologists these days—why you tend to put your thinking in religious terminology and theological language.

Tillich: Now, I think that is a very large question ...

Rogers: Yes, it is...

Tillich: ... and it could take all our time, so I want to confine myself to a few points. First: now the fundamental point is that I believe, metaphorically speaking, man lives not only in the horizontal dimension, namely the relationship of himself as a finite being to other finite beings, observing them and managing them, but he also has in himself something which I call, metaphorically, the vertical line; the line not to a heaven with God and other beings in it, but what I mean with the vertical line is towards something which is not transitory and finite; something which is infinite, unconditional, ultimate—I usually say that. Man has an experience in himself that he is more than a piece of finite objects which come and go. He experiences something beyond time and space. I don't speak here—I must emphasise this in speeches again and again—in terms

of life after death, or in other symbols which cannot be used in this way anymore, but I speak of the immediate experience of the temporal, of the eternal in the temporal, or of the temporal invaded by the eternal in some moments of our life and of the life together with other people and of the group life. Now, that is for me the reason why I try to continue to interpret the great traditional religious symbols as relevant for us: because I know, and that was the other point you made, that they have become largely irrelevant, and that we cannot use them in the way in which they are used still very much in preaching, religious teaching, and liturgies, for people who can live in them, who are not by critical analysis estranged from them, but for those large amounts of people whom you call humanists, we need a translation and interpretation of this symbol, but not, as you seem to indicate, a replacement. I don't believe that scientific language is able to express the vertical dimension adequately, because it is bound to the relationship of finite things to each other, even in psychology and certainly in all physical sciences. This is the reason why I think we need another language, and this language is the language of symbols and myths; it is a religious language. But we poor theologians, in contrast to you happy psychologists, are in the bad situation that we know the symbols with which we deal have to be reinterpreted and even *radically* reinterpreted. But I have taken this heavy yoke upon myself and I have decided long ago I will continue to the end with it.

Rogers: Well, I realised as you were talking, I have a sort of a fantasy of this vertical dimension for me, not going up, but going down. What I mean is this: I feel at times when I'm really being helpful to a client of mine, in those sort of rare moments when there is something approximating an I-Thou relationship between us, and when I feel that something significant is happening, then I feel as though I am somehow in tune with the forces in the universe or that forces are operating through me in regard to this helping relationship that—well, I guess I feel somewhat the way the scientist does when he is able to bring about the splitting of the atom. He didn't create it with his own little hands, but he nevertheless put himself in line with the significant forces of the universe and thereby was able to trigger off a significant event, and I feel much the same way, I think, oftentimes, in dealing with a client when I really am being helpful.

Tillich: I am very grateful about what you say. Now, the first words were especially interesting to me, when you said a vertical line has always an up and a down. And you will be interested to hear from me that I am accused very often by my theological colleagues that I speak much too much of down, instead of up, and that is true; when I want to give a name to that with which I am ultimately concerned, then I call it the 'ground of being' and ground is, of course, down and not up—so I go with you down. Now the question is, *where* do we go? Here again I had the feeling I could go far away with you when you use the term 'universe,' forces of the universe, but when I speak of 'ground of being,' I don't understand this depth of the universe in terms of an addition to all elements in the universe, of all single

things, but, as many philosophers and theologians did, the creative ground of the universe, that out of which all these forms and elements come: and I call it the creative ground. And this was the second point in which I was glad. This creative ground can be experienced in everything which is rooted in the creative ground. For instance, in a person-to-person encounter—and I had, without being an analyst, but in many forms of encounters with human beings, very similar experiences to those you had—there is something present which transcends the limited reality of the Thou and the Ego of the other one and of myself, and I sometimes called it at special moments the presence of the holy, in a nonreligious conversation. That I can experience and have experienced, and I agree with you.

Then, finally, there was your third point about the scientists, and I often told my scientist friends that they follow strictly the principle formulated classically by Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval theologian: if you know something, then you know something about God. And I would agree with this statement—and therefore these men also have an experience of what I like to call the vertical line, down and perhaps also up, although what they do in splitting atoms is discovering and managing the finite relations to each other.

Rogers: I'd like to shift to another topic that has been of interest to me and I suspect may be of interest to you. This is the question of what constitutes the optimal person. In other words, what is it that we're working toward, whether in therapy or in the area of religion? For myself, I have a rather simple definition, yet one which I think has a good many implications. I feel that I'm quite pleased in my work as a therapist if I find that my client and I, too, are—if we are both moving toward what I think of as greater openness to experience. If the individual is becoming more able to listen to what's going on within himself, more sensitive to the reactions he's having to a given situation, if he's more accurately perceptive of the world around him—both the world of reality and the world of relationships—then I think my feeling is I will be pleased. That's the direction I would hope we would move, because then he will be in the process—first of all, he will be in the process all the time. This isn't a static kind of a goal for an individual, and he will be in the process of becoming more fully himself. He'll also be realistic, in the best sense, in that he's realistic about what is going on within himself, as well as realistic about the world, and I think he will also be in the process of becoming more social simply because one of the elements which he can't help but actualise in himself is the need and desire for closer human relationships; so for me, this concept of openness to experience describes a good deal of what I would hope to see in the more optimal person, whether we're talking about the person who emerges from therapy, or the development of a good citizen, or whatever. I wonder if you would have any comments on that or on your own point of view in that area.

Tillich: Yes, there are two questions in this. The one is the way—namely the openness—and the other is the aim. It is, of course, not a static aim,

not a dynamic aim, but it's an aim. Let me speak to both points: the openness is a word which is very familiar to myself because there are many questions a theologian is asked, and which can be answered only by the concept of openness, or opening up. I will give you two examples. The one example is the function of classical symbols and symbols generally. I always used to answer: 'Symbols open up, they open up reality and they open up something in us.' If this word were not forbidden in the university today, I would call it something in our *soul*, but you know as a psychologist, as somebody who deals with the soul, that the word 'soul' is forbidden in academic contexts. But that's what symbols do, and they do it not only to individuals, but they do it also to groups and usually only through groups to individuals—so that's the one thing where I use the word 'open.' This seems to me one of the main functions, perhaps *the* main function of symbols—namely to open up. Then another use of the word 'open' is that I am asked, 'Now what can I do to experience God or to get the Divine Spirit?' or things like that. My answer is, 'The only thing you can do is keep yourselves open. You cannot force God down, you cannot produce the Divine Spirit in yourselves, but what you can do is open yourselves, to keep yourselves open for It.' This is, of course, in your terminology, a particular experience, but we must keep open for all experiences. So I would agree very much with the way which you have described. I would even believe that in all experiences, there is a possibility of having an ultimate experience.

Then the aim: now, the aim is the many folds we discussed. Perhaps we could agree about realisation of our true self, bringing into actuality what is essentially given to us; or, when I speak in religious symbolism, I could say: 'To become the way in which God sees us, in all our potentialities.' And what that now practically is, is the next and very important question. You also indicated something of this: namely, to become social. I think this is a part of a larger concept. I would call it love, in the sense of the Greek word *agape*, which is a particular word in the New Testament, and which means that love which is described by Paul in I Corinthians 13, and which accepts the other as a person and then tries to reunite with him and to overcome the separation, the existential separation, which exists between men and men. Now, with this aim, I would agree; but I would add, of course, since I speak also in terms of the vertical dimension, that it is the keeping *to* that dimension to maintain in the faith into an ultimate meaning of life, and the absolute and unconditional seriousness of this direction of this ultimate aim of life. So when I shall speak now in popular terms, which is very dangerous always, I would say: faith and love are the two concepts which are necessary, but faith not in the sense of beliefs but in the sense of being related to the ultimate, and love not in the sense of any sentimentality, but in a sense of affirming the other person and *even* one's own person, because I believe with Augustine, Eric Fromm, and others, that there is a justified self-affirmation and self-acceptance. I wouldn't use the term

'self-love'—that's too difficult—but self-affirmation and self-acceptance, one of the most difficult things to reach.

Rogers: Well, I find that I like it best when you become concrete; that is, when you put it in terms of faith and love. Those can be very abstract concepts which can have all kinds of different meanings, but putting it in the concrete—yes, I do feel that the person does have to gain a real appreciation of or liking of himself, if he is going to affirm himself in a healthy and useful fashion. There's one other corollary to this notion of being open to experience that we might explore a bit, too. To me, the individual who is reasonably open to his experience is involved in a continuous valuing process; that is, I think that—I realise that I've sort of dropped the notion of values in the conventional sense of there being certain values which you could list, and that kind of thing—but it does seem to me that the individual who is open to his experience is continually valuing each moment and valuing his behaviour in each moment, as to whether it is related to his own self-fulfilment, his own actualisation, and that it's that kind of valuing process that to me makes sense in the mature person. It also makes sense in a world where the whole situation is changing so rapidly that I feel that ordinary lists of values are probably not as appropriate or meaningful as they were in periods gone by.

Tillich: Yes. Now I am an outspoken critic of the philosophy of values, so I certainly agree with you. I replace this thing by my concept of *agape*, or love—namely, love which is listening. I call it listening love, which doesn't follow abstract valuations, but which is related to the concrete situation, and out of its listening to this very moment gains its decision for action and its inner feeling of satisfaction and even joy or dissatisfaction and bad conscience.

Rogers: I like that phrase because I think it could be a listening within, a listening to oneself, as well as a listening love for the other individual ...

Tillich: Yes, when I say listening to the situation, I mean the situation is constituted out of everything around me and myself; so, listening love is always listening to both sides.

Rogers: I feel we're not very far apart in our thinking about this value approach; I thought we might be further apart than we seem to be. But, one other instance: I feel that the small infant is a good example of the valuing process that is going on continuously. He isn't troubled by the concepts and standards that have been built up for adults, and he is continually valuing his experience as either making for his enhancement or being opposed to that actualisation.

Tillich: Now, this valuation, of course, would be not an intellectual valuation, but an evaluation with his whole being ...

Rogers: I think of it as an organismic valuing process.

Tillich: That means a reaction of his whole being, and I certainly believe that it is an adequate description.