



9-27-2017

All Things Denote There is a God: A Response to Gantt and Thayne

Michael J. Richardson

Brigham Young University, michael_richardson@byu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp>

 Part of the [Counseling Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), [Religion Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Richardson, Michael J. (2017) "All Things Denote There is a God: A Response to Gantt and Thayne," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*: Vol. 38 : No. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol38/iss1/9>

This Article or Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

All Things Denote There Is a God: A Response to Gantt and Thayne

MICHAEL J. RICHARDSON

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

Michael J. Richardson, PhD, is a developmental and theoretical psychologist working in the department of teacher education at Brigham Young University. Prior to Brigham Young University he worked with youth and their families in schools, in state correctional and child welfare contexts, and in homes as a family preservation consultant. Address for correspondence: Michael J. Richardson, 201 MCKB, Teacher Education Department, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602. Email: michael_richardson@byu.edu.

ABSTRACT

Gantt and Thayne's (pp. 3–21) cautions about Rogerian psychotherapy are warranted. Certainly, the theory has been interpreted in ways that lead to the very dangers they highlight. However, there may be more to the theory than first meets the eye, and the very dangers invoked by the theory might also represent opportunities. Neglecting some of the truths in the theory might alienate its proponents rather than persuade them of a better way. In this response, possible compatibilities between the theory and the gospel are explored, along with ways in which these might provide inroads for LDS psychologists to influence a secular discipline.

I appreciate this opportunity to respond to Gantt and Thayne (pp. 3–21). I have a great deal of respect for both of these authors and have deeply appreciated the opportunities I have had to associate with them both in person and through reading and responding to their work. I agree that psychological theories have in some ways weakened religious understandings through offering materialistic explanations for spiritual phenomena (such as unfeigned love). I have also

argued that religious psychologists might reverse this secularizing trend and bring religious views into the broader psychological discourse (Richardson, 2013). I think that accomplishing this might require not only describing incompatibilities between some secular and religious understandings—which is important—but also attending more carefully to compatibilities.

Gantt and Thayne's concern about situating such conversations primarily in secular psychological

language is warranted. Certainly, some of this language, perhaps by design, excludes spiritual understandings. However, religious psychologists also need to be able to communicate with their secular colleagues and at times might be required to justify their practices to the broader discipline. Being clearer about the compatibilities between religious beliefs and a secular theory, as well as being up front about the incompatibilities, might help avoid unnecessary alienation of religious psychologists from others in the discipline, and vice versa. It might also open pathways for religious influence in an otherwise secular discipline.

Proponents of Rogers's theory (whether religious or secular) might object to (a) Gantt and Thayne's emphasis on Rogers's unconditional positive regard without grounding it in the context of his other important therapeutic elements, accurate empathy (or understanding) and genuineness (or honesty), and (b) Gantt and Thayne's emphasis on individualism and relativism in Rogers's theory over relational and non-relativistic aspects of the theory. In what follows, I address each of these possible objections while exploring ways in which communication between religious and secular psychologists might be facilitated without sacrificing important religious understandings.

Before continuing, let me first clarify where I think Gantt and Thayne's analysis is fair. I agree that Rogers's theory has been interpreted in ways that emphasize the same philosophical individualism and materialism inherent in most secular counseling theories. Like many secular psychologists prior to and contemporary with him, Rogers abandoned religious belief in favor of materialistic science, thereby cutting himself off (at least consciously) from the source of truth. Of course, since God is in and through all things (D&C 63:59) and "all things denote there is a God" (Alma 30:44), no theorist can escape God or truth altogether. So, there is still much truth in Rogers's theory from which we might benefit as religious psychologists and that might provide a path for religious psychologists to influence the secular community. That path should no longer represent only a one-way secularizing path, as it often has in the past, but instead of potentially reducing our influence by closing it off altogether, we might see if we can open a few lanes in the other direction.

UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD

I believe that Gantt and Thayne's concerns about unconditional positive regard are warranted. It seems that Rogers's description of this therapeutic element, and its associated radical acceptance (of self and others), has been interpreted in precisely the ways these authors describe. Indeed, Rogers himself appears to have taken liberties with this element near the end of his life in sometimes putting his own perceived needs ahead of those of his ailing wife. To his credit, he also recognized the pain this caused his wife and seemed to feel that subsequent efforts to improve this relationship were successful. After his wife's death, Rogers appeared to allow himself even more liberties that might cause alarm from an LDS perspective, including sexual experiences. However, the permission Rogers gave himself to explore his own desires later in life also seems to have led him to question his former doubts about spiritual realities (Rogers, 1980).

So there is certainly room for concern when considering Rogers's permissiveness. However, his claim that this openness to experience also helped bring him (not without suffering) closer to his family, more joy in life (as well as more sorrow), and ultimately room to exercise a "particle of faith" (Alma 32:27) in spiritual possibilities might also give us encouragement to consider ways in which his theory might open possibilities for allowing religious psychologists to influence a secular discipline. In some ways, Rogers's theory might be uniquely situated for this endeavor since it appears to have evoked in him a humility and openness to possibilities that have been largely ignored by other secular theorists.

It is certainly true that unconditional positive regard alone could be problematic, even in the ways that Rogers experienced for himself. However, I argue that unconditional positive regard did not mean, for Rogers, that evil does not exist or that there should be no consequences for bad behavior. Nor did Rogers forbid therapists from expressing their own feelings about something a client expressed with which they disagreed. He primarily encouraged therapists to express their feelings as their own, and to allow clients to do the same, without labeling these expressions as right or wrong, good or evil. In describing what he *did* mean by unconditional positive regard, Rogers

(1961) wrote, “By acceptance I mean a warm regard for him as a person of unconditional self-worth—of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings (p. 34).

It should be fairly uncontroversial in an LDS context that the worth of a soul does not diminish when that person sins and that we are commanded to love even our enemies so that we may be like our Father in Heaven (Matt. 5: 44–45). However, it is also true, as Gantt and Thayne have observed, that this unconditional valuing of a person has come to be interpreted as requiring acceptance of false ideas and harmful attitudes or behaviors. Rogers bears some responsibility for this interpretation by expecting that in therapeutic contexts, at least, a client’s attitudes and behaviors not be given evaluative labels such as good or bad, right or wrong.

However, this danger might be mitigated somewhat if proponents of Rogerian ideas learned that Rogers (1961) did not demand that there be no judgment in *any* context but indicated that non-judgment is important primarily in the *therapeutic* context. Although he doubted that judgments would help in the growth of individuals in any context, and even felt that they might interfere, he wrote, “I believe [judgments] have a certain social usefulness to institutions and organizations such as schools and professions” (p. 54). That is, judgment is useful to the well-being of society at large if not to the individual. I do think separation of individual and social good might represent an inconsistency in Rogers’s theory. Still, as Charles Taylor (2007) describes, it is true that religion, along with other institutions (e.g., educational and professional), has contributed to the development of the sort of cultural contexts that value and protect personal liberty. It is in these contexts in particular that Rogers’s corresponding value flourishes. Without some claim to judgment, such institutions might not exist and with them might vanish our modern way of life, along with Rogers’s theory.

So Rogers was astute in recognizing the need for judgment in certain institutional contexts. This important distinction might be useful for religious therapists in helping clients and colleagues understand why religious leaders are justified in teaching about righteousness and sin, while therapists might also be justified in leaving the judgment to

others. Still, religious therapists cannot be limited only to individualistic and secular expressions in the therapeutic context. Another possible avenue for religious expression, even within a therapeutic context, arises in Rogers’s emphasis on genuineness.

GENUINENESS

Genuineness, or honesty, might have been for Rogers an even more important value than unconditional positive regard. He writes (Rogers, 1961):

Being genuine . . . involves the willingness to be and to express, in my words and my behavior, the various feelings and attitudes which exist in me. It is only in this way that the relationship can have *reality*, and reality seems deeply important as a first condition. (p. 33)

Rogers appeared to suggest here that reality, honesty, or genuineness is a “*first condition*” for therapy and so might be even more fundamental than unconditional positive regard.

Rogers continues, “It is only by providing the genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can successfully seek for the reality in him” (p. 33). Here Rogers describes a quite powerful (and often neglected) form of moral persuasion. Rather than telling the client that he or she *must* be honest, Rogers shows the client *how* to be honest by his own actions. Similarly, rather than telling the client that he or she *must* love, Rogers makes a powerful argument by his own actions for the moral importance of loving others. These two values combined, genuineness and love, seem very like what Gantt and Thayne (p. 19) describe as “unfeigned love.”

Rogers (1961) *requires* then, as a first condition of effective therapy, that the therapist (even, perhaps, if he or she is religious) be honest and upfront about his or her own beliefs and feelings:

The most basic learning for anyone who hopes to establish any kind of helping relationship is that it is safe to be transparently real. If in a given relationship I am reasonably congruent, if no feelings relevant to the relationship are hidden either to me or to the other person, then I can be almost sure that the relationship will be a helpful one. (p. 51)

For the LDS therapist, this genuineness might include lovingly sharing personal testimony of the truthfulness

of the gospel and the wisdom of the commandments while allowing the client similar expression of his or her own beliefs. Expressing one's own beliefs and feelings, for Rogers (1961), is a more honest form of expression than trying to point out where the other person might be wrong:

It seems that part of the reason this works out constructively is that in therapy the individual learns to recognize and express his feelings *as* his own feelings and not as a fact about another person. Thus, to say to one's spouse "What you are doing is all wrong," is likely to lead only to debate. But to say "I feel very much annoyed by what you're doing" is to state one fact about the speaker's feelings, a fact which no one can deny." (pp. 318–319)

Similarly, a testimony borne about one's own beliefs and feelings cannot reasonably be denied. And when borne without condemnation of the other, it is less likely that the other will feel a desire to counter it. In this sense, honest expression of one's own feelings without judgment of the other person might indeed be a more powerful way to lead another person to change than evaluating or criticizing him or her.

ACCURATE EMPATHY

For Rogers, it would be more genuine or honest to say that one believes the gospel to be true than to pretend that one has no beliefs that might influence one's approach to therapy. However, to insist that the gospel is obviously true, and that therefore it should be obvious to a doubting client, might display a lack of accurate empathy. The truth of the gospel might be obvious to the therapist, but it might not be obvious to the client. Rogers (1961) writes:

It is only as I *understand* the feelings and thoughts which seem so horrible to you, or so weak, or so sentimental, or so bizarre—it is only as I see them as you see them, and accept them and you, that you feel really free to explore all the hidden nooks and frightening cran- nies of your inner and often buried experience. (p. 34)

I am reminded in this context of some advice I once heard for bishops. If a young person approaches the bishop to make a confession, he or she might nervously start with the elements of the sin that he

or she sees as less horrible—in order to test the water. A young man who got drunk and had sex might start by admitting that he had tried alcohol. If the bishop indignantly erupts with, "How *could* you? You *know* better!" he might never hear the extent to which the youth indulged in alcohol and will almost certainly hear nothing about the sex.

It might be that only after the bishop empathetically understands the young man's fear and shame, as well as his sin, that the youth might fully admit the sin. Removing the need for defensiveness might also allow the young man to explore some of his other, more positive, and perhaps more powerful, desires that compete with a desire for sin. For example, before reminding a person about the seriousness of his or her sin, a bishop might ask how the person thinks or feels about his or her action now that the moment of temptation has passed. After all, some thought or feeling brought the person to the bishop's office to confess. What were the spiritual and emotional consequences of the behavior from the person's perspective? What does the person feel he or she should have done differently, or what does he or she hope to do differently in the future? Accurate empathy requires that the bishop, or therapist, also seeks for and understands these competing righteous desires. Otherwise, if the person's attention is directed by perceived criticism toward defense or justification of a hurtful behavior, these righteous impulses might be forgotten.

It might be important for religious psychologists to remind their Rogerian colleagues that Rogers did not only advocate for recognition of the hurtful impulse but also for recognition of the helpful impulse. This is too often neglected, I believe, in both religious and nonreligious helping contexts. With such persistent emphasis on "disorder" or sin, the therapist and client both might miss the "order" and goodness within the client. Missing something so important in the client's experience would not represent accurate empathy.

With these two additional Rogerian anchors together (genuineness and accurate empathy), we seem to have something even closer to what Gantt and Thayne (p. 19) describe as "unfeigned love":

The key difference between the genuine, unfeigned love that God has for us (and which we should have

for each other) and the “unconditional positive regard” that Rogerian humanism venerates as the cure for the struggle for sexual self-identity is that unfeigned love is *not* indifferent to the behavior and desires of those we love. (p. 37)

I do accept that the rendition of “unconditional positive regard” described by Gantt and Thayne may have come to be dangerously venerated in humanistic psychology, but it seems that this might not be what Rogers intended. Rather, it seems he intended something much more like Gantt and Thayne describe. When we consider his three essential therapeutic elements together, indifference seems far from Rogers’s intent.

Similarly, although Russell M. Nelson (2003) and other Church leaders have cautioned against the word *unconditional* when applied to divine love—likely because of the very baggage Gantt and Thayne describe—they also invariably acknowledge that God’s love is infinite and enduring. It is clear that these leaders understand that there is a difference between enduring, infinite love (which, if described as recognizing the worth of a soul in spite of his or her sins, seems very like Rogers’s unconditional positive regard) and unconditional positive *consequences*. Yet, Rogers acknowledged this difference as well. Although he wanted unconditional valuing of the person, and even acceptance of however he or she might use his or her agency, he also recognized that actions have consequences that no therapist can mitigate. Accurate empathy and genuineness require a recognition of these consequences, positive and negative, as they are experienced by a client. Contrary to how his theory might now be viewed, Rogers’s views on this included elements that were decidedly relational and nonrelativistic.

INDIVIDUALISM AND RELATIVISM

Gantt and Thayne have rightly pointed out that individualism and relativism have been associated with Rogers’s approach. However, Rogers did not consider himself a moral relativist, and his theory—although emphasizing individual value and agency—also acknowledged our inevitably relational nature and even hinted at the need for self-transcendence.

ROGERS’S MORALITY

Rogers’s nonrelativistic morality was highlighted in a conversation between Rogers and Gregory Bateson (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989). Bateson, who initially took a more relativistic position in his conversation with Rogers, mused that while he himself was a theorist (working primarily in the realm of theory rather than application), Rogers actually “believes that what you do matters”:

[Rogers] starts, you see, in the first two minutes, by saying there’s good and evil in the world and he knows which is which, and five years later he will produce data to prove that he’s right. I’m not so sure about the good and evil. I believe there is good and evil in the world. As to which they are, that’s difficult. (p. 182)

Rogers does not contradict this characterization but in response notes some of Bateson’s criticisms of behaviorism (with which Rogers agreed) and says:

I noticed in your remarks about behavior modification that you, too, have your values. You may not call them good and evil, but no one would have to guess very hard as to the value you’ve placed on that. (Bateson laughs.) I want you to respond to that, because I feel that one of the things that I’ve come to value is not hiding our values. (p. 186)

Bateson responds, “Yes, well I plead guilty” (p. 186) but protests that he is situating his values not only in *feelings* but also in intellectual analysis—to which Rogers responds:

Then I think that perhaps one real difference between us is that, if I’ve got it correctly, you justify the feelings that you have about it on the basis of your analysis of whether it is true or not. Well, I happen to agree with your analysis. But I think that the feelings exist whether or not the analysis is true. And I feel it is just as valuable to be aware of feelings as it is to be aware of our intellectual processes. And that often even scholars get screwed up, if I may use a technical term, by not paying attention to their feelings, but only to the ideas that they have generated. (p. 187)

So it becomes clearer in this conversation that Rogers does not advocate awareness and acceptance of personal desires for relativistic or hedonistic purposes but for accessing one’s feelings about what is right,

true, or good. This, without neglecting intellectual processes.

This calls to my mind God's emphasis on revealing the truth to our minds *and* to our hearts (D&C 8:2), which provides two "witnesses," reducing the likelihood that either intellect alone or heart alone might lead us astray (or cause us to "get screwed up," in Rogers's terms). A third witness might be found in the consequences that follow thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, both within and beyond ourselves. These Rogers also acknowledged in nonrelativistic terms:

To me, the person who offers the most hope in our crazy world today, which could be wiping itself out, is the individual who is most fully aware—most fully aware of what is going on within himself: physiologically, feeling-wise, his thoughts; also aware of the external world that is impinging on him. The more fully he is aware of the whole system . . . the more hope there is that he would live a balanced human life without the violence, the craziness, the deceit, the horrible things we tend to do to each other in the modern world. (pp. 188–189)

So Rogers acknowledges the very real possibility of evil but emphasizes his belief that this evil is more likely to emerge from social influences (e.g. coercive authority figures) than from within the individual. Bateson then asks how students in Rogers's educational system would have their erroneous ideas corrected, if not by the sort of authoritative pressure applied by teachers. Rogers responds:

Well, I think that you have more confidence for yourself than I have for myself . . . that you know some of the things that students must and should know. I don't have that degree of confidence. I don't think I do know what they should know. And I am perfectly sure that they will pick up erroneous ideas in courses they might take with me as well as in courses they might have with others. But if they are directing their own learning, it will be corrected in the same way that my learning and yours is corrected. We no longer go to teachers, we get corrected by our life experiences. (pp. 194–195)

I believe this begins to get at the core of Rogers's thinking. He believed in right and wrong, good and evil, but he did not have confidence in the accepted authoritative sources of truth (and perhaps with good reason, from his own experience with sectarian religion and secular government). He believed that

given agency—learning the good from the evil by their own experience—people would more likely discover the truth than by being coercively instructed by a fallible authority figure. Without inspired leaders, this is certainly the situation in which many find themselves in the world, but even in gospel contexts we are encouraged to seek our own witness of authoritative teaching—in our minds and hearts and in reflecting on the consequences of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Rogers's concern about authority is also reminiscent of Mosiah's reasons for wanting to turn the government over to the voice of the people rather than letting it remain in the hands of one potentially flawed authority figure. After describing the destruction that could result by placing their trust in a single powerful authority (a king), Mosiah explained:

Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people. (Mosiah 29:26)

Rogers might have been extreme in his beliefs about how to actualize the good—primarily through unfettered self-direction, or a more libertarian form of democracy than has been typical historically—but he was certainly not a moral relativist. As Bateson hinted, Rogers might be more accurately accused of moral naiveté than of moral relativism. Rollo May, another rationalist contemporary, hints at this possibility in a letter to Rogers (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989):

A colleague tells me that when you [Rogers] had the discussion with Martin Buber in Michigan you said, "Man is basically good," and Buber answered, "Man is basically good—and evil." I am arguing that we must include a view of the evil in our world and in ourselves no matter how much that evil offends our narcissism. (p. 248)

Rogers provides a two-fold response to this insightful criticism:

You [Rollo May] have never seemed to care whether the evil impulses in man are genetic and inherent or whether they are acquired after birth. For you they are just there. For me their origin makes a great deal of difference philosophically. (p. 253)

So Rogers did not deny that evil impulses exist but questioned the idea that they are inherent. Rogers then affirmed that he believed goodness (an actualizing tendency) is inherent but that in his experience he saw no inherent evil tendency in human beings. He then explains:

So how do I account for the evil behavior that is so obviously present in our world? In my experience, every person has the capacity for evil behavior. I, and others, have had murderous and cruel impulses, desires to hurt, feelings of anger and rage, desires to impose our wills on others. It is well to bear in mind that I also have a capacity to vomit, for example. Whether I, or anyone, will translate these impulses into behavior depends, it seems to me, on two elements: social conditioning and voluntary choice. (pp. 253–254)

Rogers's optimistic view of human nature, tempered by acknowledgement of social influence and personal agency, seems remarkably similar to a scriptural description (D&C 93:30–31, 38–39):

30. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.

31. Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.

38. Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.

39. And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers.

In these verses, it appears that humanity's basic nature is indeed good (or innocent), as Rogers supposed and perhaps contrary to the apparent assumptions of Buber and May (and much of traditional religion). The Lord then explains a three-fold source for evil: traditions of their fathers (vs. 39), misuse of personal agency (vs. 30–31, 39), and the "wicked one" (vs. 39). Of these, Rogers names two explicitly (tradition, or "social conditioning"; and agency, or "voluntary choice") and only hints at the possibility of a third.

It is clear from verse 39 that the "wicked one" is able to take away the inherent goodness (light and truth) of humankind only after they misuse their agency "through disobedience," which comes "because of the tradition of their fathers."

Rogers hints at the possibility of a self-existent evil (a "wicked one"), or that voice that entices us to evil (2 Nephi 2:16), by acknowledging the existence of "murderous and cruel impulses" that can be actualized through "social conditioning and voluntary choice" (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, p. 254). He describes these impulses as if they also arise from the person, but in a non-normative fashion, by comparing them to the impulse to vomit, which usually comes only when we have taken something into our system that is unnatural or unhealthy for it. That Rogers does not recognize the source of such evil impulses as a "wicked one" can be understood by his rejection of traditional religion. This is a serious flaw in Rogers's theory, though perhaps an understandable one, and corresponds to his failure to situate good impulses in God and our relationship to Him as children.

ROGERS'S RELATIONALITY

So perhaps Rogers's theory is not relativistic, but is it still individualistic? After all, it is the individual's organismic valuing process that leads the individual to self-actualization. It should be clear now that Rogers does not deny social realities, but are these, for Rogers, only a source of evil? Rollo May hints at this danger of humanistic psychology in the same letter to Rogers (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989):

Thus Yankelovich . . . can say . . . that humanistic psychology is the narcissism of our culture. I believe he is right. The narcissists are persons who are turned inward rather than outward, who are so lost in self-love that they cannot see and relate to the reality outside themselves, including other human beings. (p. 249)

This assessment clearly troubled Rogers, who responds:

When you speak of the narcissism that has been fostered by humanistic psychology and how many individuals are "lost in self-love," I feel like speaking up and saying, "That's not true!" Then I realize that what I am saying is that it is not true in my experience, but my

experience is limited to clients and groups dealt with by my particular brand of humanistic psychology and philosophy. . . . If these characteristics have emerged in other facets of the humanistic movement, I have not been in contact with them. I realize this is quite possible because I am not closely in touch with other aspects of the humanistic movement.

In the groups with which I have had contact, the truth is quite the contrary. Such groups lead to social action of a realistic nature. Individuals who come in as social fanatics become much more socially realistic, but they still want to take action. People who have not been very aware of social issues become more aware, and, again, opt for realistic action on those issues. (pp. 251–252)

So Rogers seemed to acknowledge the possibility that excessive self-focus—which Gantt and Thayne suggest followed Rogers’s humanism—might emerge from other interpretations of humanistic psychology. However, he suggested that his approach (rightly understood) should have the opposite effect. Elsewhere, Rogers (1961) describes more explicitly how even a therapy that emphasizes self-awareness, self-expression, and personal agency might lead to better relational awareness as a client seeks to genuinely express her or his feelings and a therapist seeks to genuinely understand them.

In these moments there is, to borrow Buber’s phrase, a real “I-Thou” relationship, a timeless living in the experience which is between the client and me. It is at the opposite pole from seeing the client, or myself, as an object. (p. 202)

Part of this genuine understanding of self and others is recognition of personal agency and the corresponding influence we might have on others. Rogers continues:

Involved in this process of becoming himself is a profound experience of personal choice. He realizes that he can choose to continue to hide behind a façade, or that he can take the risks involved in being himself; that he is a free agent who has it within his power to destroy another, or himself, and also the power to enhance himself and others. (p. 203)

In Rogers’s experience, increased awareness of personal agency and accountability, although not itself the solution to a person’s problems, has important relational implications:

But being himself doesn’t “solve problems.” It simply opens up a new way of living in which there is more depth and more height in the experience of his feelings; more breadth and more range. He feels more unique and hence more alone, but he is so much more real that his relationships with others lose their artificial quality, become deeper, more satisfying, and draw more of the realness of the other person into the relationship. (p. 203)

Rogers (1961) finally contrasts his vision of the behavioral sciences with the prevailing (at the time) behavioristic view, which emphasized prediction and control. Here it becomes clear again that—whether correct or incorrect in his theorizing about human nature—Rogers did not fundamentally assume or primarily value individualism, nor did he see the individual as isolated from the social context. Rather, he saw individual freedom as inextricable from the social context and necessary, not only for self-actualization but also for self-transcendence:

We can, if we wish, choose to make men submissive, conforming, docile. Or at the other end of the spectrum of choice we can choose to use the behavioral sciences in ways which will free, not control; which will bring about constructive variability, not conformity; which will develop creativity, not contentment; which will facilitate each person in his self-directed process of becoming; which will aid individuals, groups, and even the concept of science, to become self-transcending in freshly adaptive ways of meeting life and its problems. The choice is up to us, and the human race being what it is, we are likely to stumble about, making at times some nearly disastrous value choices, and at other times highly constructive ones. (p. 400)

This sounds almost like an argument that might have been made in the war in heaven. Agency might at times result in evil (“disastrous value choices”), Rogers acknowledged, but it will ultimately enable a far greater good, including self-transcendence. Although at this time Rogers could be described as a materialistic empiricist, perhaps unlike many of his like-minded contemporaries, he seemed to be tapping into something that transcended even his own vision of science. He continues:

In conclusion then, it is my contention that science cannot come into being without a personal choice of the values we wish to achieve. And these values

we choose to implement will forever lie outside the science which implements them; the goals we select, the purposes we wish to follow, must always be outside of the science which achieves them. To me this has the encouraging meaning that the human person, with his capacity of subjective choice, can and will always exist, separate from and prior to any of his scientific undertakings. Unless as individuals and groups we choose to relinquish our capacity of subjective choice, we will always remain free persons, not simply pawns of a self-created behavioral science. (pp. 400–401)

A TWO-WAY STREET

The above quotes, I think, highlight both a key criticism of Rogers's work and an important potential inroad for religious views into a secular science. Rogers hints at realities that his materialistic understanding of human nature cannot fully explain—such as a transcendent moral agency and a mysterious organismic valuing process that tends toward the good. He asserts the existence of inherent good but cannot explain why it exists inherently (although he does a better job articulating the source of evil). He also seems to underestimate Bateson's concern about not being able to tell the difference between good and evil. He implies that Bateson's criticism of behavior modification suggests that Bateson does know the difference, but Rogers seems to miss the deeper point that philosophical materialism can provide no reason why anyone *should* know the difference. It was in part this otherwise inexplicable, apparently inescapable, moral awareness that drew C. S. Lewis (2001) back to theism.

These materialistic limitations might be the source of common interpretations of Rogers, which Gantt and Thayne rightly identify as dangerous from a gospel perspective. If we do not know why one thing ought to be valued over another, then why not accept all values equally (something Rogers clearly did not do himself)? If we do not know why individuals have the ability to choose what they value, then why assume they have any choice at all (as Rogers assumed they did)? Why not just accept them for what they are, without assuming that they can, will, or should grow toward a better way of being (as Rogers assumed they would)? Or, if we cannot explain why the choice

of one way of being should be more valuable than another, why label one choice as more self-actualizing than another (as Rogers did with choices to be loving, honest, and understanding)? Further, if we cannot explain why the individual should value relationship after experiencing radical personal agency, then why not simply value individualistic freedom for its own sake? Or in other words, why not assume that humanistic psychology will as likely lead to narcissistic self-love (which Rogers resisted) as to deeper relationships (which Rogers valued)? These were clearly not outcomes Rogers intended, but I believe his failure to situate value and truth in their divine source inevitably led to his theory being interpreted as radically individualistic and relativistic. It might also have led to his own late-life self-permissiveness.

This difficulty has relevance for Gantt and Thayne's emphasis on self-denial, or the submission of self to Christ. This is indeed central in the gospel. There is a possibility for confusion if we are unsure of what self we are denying or to what manner of Being we are submitting. We want to shed, of course, the false self from Rogers's viewpoint, or the natural man from an LDS viewpoint. This is an important distinction. It might be difficult to extract from Rogers's theory which personal desires are consistent with our true selves (other than those that are loving, honest, and understanding) or what to do about false desires when we find them out. The gospel provides better direction. In short, to know our true selves, we must come to know our divine source, our Heavenly Parents.

So Gantt and Thayne rightly warn us of the dangers, but these very dangers might also represent opportunities. Where Rogers is vague, and he seems to be often vague, pathways might open for religious influence in an otherwise secular discipline. Ammon used the language of the Lamanites ("the Great Spirit") to scaffold Lamoni's understanding of the true God (Alma 18). Similarly, Paul used the language of the Greeks ("the Unknown God") to scaffold Greek understanding of the true God (Acts 17). Paul goes on to speak of becoming "as a Jew," and "as without law," and "as weak" in order to persuade people of different backgrounds and experiences to believe in Christ (1 Cor. 9). "I am made all things to all men," he writes, "that I might by all means save some" (vs. 22).

It appears—if Gantt and Thayne’s article is needed—that many psychotherapists and clients still value a Rogerian approach. For these people, pointing primarily to incompatibilities might not suffice to get them to abandon their psychology in favor of religion. Indeed, it might as soon do the reverse. However, in explaining why religion better accounts for the very real goods Rogers observed (such as love, honesty, and understanding), and provides a surer guide to actualizing them, we might have a better chance of reversing the secularizing influence of psychology on our religion and begin to appropriately infuse our psychology with the proper spirit.

REFERENCES

- Kirschenbaum, H., & Henderson, V. L. (Eds.). (1989). *Carl Rogers: Dialogues*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Lewis, C. S. (2001). *Mere Christianity: A revised and amplified edition, with a new introduction, of the three books, Broadcast talks, Christian behaviour, and Beyond personality*. San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.
- Nelson, R. M. (2003). Divine love. *Ensign*. Retrieved from <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2003/02/divine-love>
- Richardson, M. J. (2013). Baptized in acid or breathed with life? An exploration of psychology’s bridging capacity. *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*, 35, 37–46.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist’s view of psychotherapy*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rogers, C. R. (1980). *A way of being*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.