On Beginning to Think of Counseling

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The person who is just beginning to think about counseling usually encounters difficulty in conceptualizing just what counseling is, what counselors do, and what is required to become a counselor. Reading what is written about counseling can lead to considerable confusion or can produce a feeling of strangeness in the reader. Yet counseling is a vocation which deals directly with strangeness, with the unusual, with perplexity. It is the counselor, more than most others, who seeks the meaning of being human; who aids in the discovery of what is means to be and to become. Through various means a counselor enables a person to understand what it is that influences him, how he experiences and feels about himself, how he feels about others and aspects of his objective environment, and what his thoughts are. Further, counseling can enable a person to behave differently and develop an awareness of the consequences of doing so.

In this essay, I am going to try to carry on a personal dialogue with you the reader to the end that some of my thoughts about counseling can be understood by you. Please notice that I said understood. By this I do not intend that you agree with me or that you disagree with me. Nor do I seek your approval, nor your judgments. Most of all, I ask that you try first to grasp what I write as a rendering visible of what I think and not as what I would have you believe. You have the rest of your life to discover what you believe; and there is only a brief time for us to think together.

I have titled this essay: "On Beginning to Think..." With this title I point to the basic intention of what I write. That is, beginning. Counseling is a profession of human contact. As such it can be approached from philosophy, psychology, neurology, theology; even drama and art. Indeed, how do we begin? Well, perhaps just by beginning. I have very few, if any, conclusive thoughts on counseling. So I will dwell on one thought after another and in this fashion you and I may find several beginnings which will lead us toward common understanding.
I'll begin by asking myself just what kind of person would I choose to counsel me. I am loathe to suggest for others what I myself could not profit from. To begin with, I would want to be with someone who would not confuse me with other people. I would want him to see me, hear me, be with me as I am and not as he thought I should be. You see, to myself I am real, I am alive, I am nobody else than myself. Least of all am I an "average", "mean", "median" or "mode." Nor am I number 6657. I am not Sam Smith -- one instance out of a general class of Sam Smiths with each case or instance identical to every other case in the general class of Sam Smiths. I am not represented by my mother, my father, my political party my IQ, my sex habits nor my occupation. In fact I am not represented at all -- I am original. Are you? Now when my counselor turned his ears and eyes toward me, I'd like him to have developed his own thoughts, feelings and beliefs to the point that he would recognize me as the living, changing human being that I am. I really don't like being treated as a ghost -- my own or anyone else's.

I would want him to listen to me. Not occasionally, nor idly, nor selectively, nor prejudicially, but to deeply listen to me with his ears, his eyes and his imagination. While he listened, I'd hope that his own thoughts, fantasies, disapprovals and approvals would somehow be held in abeyance. You see, I have learned that I can really not listen and talk or listen and fantasize at the same time beyond the most superficial instance. I would be inclined to believe that he could not do so either. Therefore if his own head began working while I was talking, I imagine that he would no longer hear what I was saying. If you think into the matter just a bit, you can learn how much easier it is to talk than to listen. Just a tiny bit of listening will show how the talkers (in Kierkegaard's term: gabblers; in Heidegger's term: chatterers; in Perls' term: bull-shitters) predominate. Like Siddharta, I have learned the healing power of listening. If I was distressed, or conflicted or confused to the point that I would seek out counseling, I would certainly want to be listened to in a profound manner.

I would look for a counselor who was deeply centered, for I have discovered that the centered person trusts himself. Trusting himself, he could then trust me. Without trust, we would have no foundation upon which to build a
living, responsive relationship. With trust we could disclose our thoughts, feelings, imaginations and actions to each other secure in the knowledge that neither would betray the other. The person who dwells deeply in his own center has touched great powers of concentration and imagination. He can think single-mindedly on a single entity. If I am the entity (counselhee) then I want to have single-minded thinking available to me from the counselor. Yes, I want his full attention.

I would seek out the counselor who had learned what was necessary about himself that he could refrain from judging me. Under judgment a human being is held static or restricted; virtually never expanded. I have learned how failure shrivels me and how being judged makes me a dwarf. I wish to become larger, not smaller; stronger, not weaker; more whole, not more fragmented. Handing down judgments is an easily acquired skill; learning to suspend judgment is enormously difficult. Being able to put judgments in brackets requires careful discriminations between self and other, requires knowing the difference between opinion and thought, between fact and fantasy, between my experience of you and your experience of me; and, most of all, requires a personal refusal to use or betray another person for one's own purposes. If I seek counseling, I wish to be listened to - not judged. Before being judged I ask understanding -- judgements are everywhere, understanding is rare.

I would look for a counselor who was responsive to me. I would be asking him to participate in my life, to be with me, to care for me. He is a difference to me and I would want my presence to make a difference to him. I would want him to be concretely responsive -- to be attuned to my mood, my emotions, my thoughts, my movements, my face, my body, the way I breathe, the way I walk, sit and stand. I would want him to receive my silences as a gift and not destroy them with his talk. I would listen to responsiveness in the sound of his voice, in the words he used and how he said them, in his silences and his hesitations. If his body were a wooden stick or a sack of clay, then I would feel lost or abandoned. If he quickly agreed or disagreed, approved or disapproved, advised or judged then I would wonder who he was responding to for it wouldn't be me.

While I would recognize the near futility of so doing, I would search for a counselor who would not regard me as a particular aspect of some system: the school, the class, society, unemployed or whatever. I have
learned that the "system" promises much and brings little. Kierkegaard wrote for us, "System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality." Even more to the point is Bergson's observation that "...we cannot sacrifice experience to the requirements of a system." Or, further, Marcel tells us that once the rules and demands of a system are accepted, then we easily yield to "...the temptation to declare a priori that this or that difficulty is to be judged unimportant and consequently set aside." In going to a counselor I wish my experiencing of things to be grasped as fundamentally important; I exist but not as a fractional part of a system, and I do not wish for my needs, values, thoughts, feelings or choices to be out of hand judged unimportant and set aside as subservient to systemic requirements. Actually, life as I experience it and as I have shared the life experience of other persons is contrary to systematization. The decisive feature of every system is breakdown or failure and the only way in which I understand my life to correspond to the finality of system is in final breakdown or death. If we are to find our true depth as existent beings then somehow we must mount a "sustained refusal to obscure critical moments in our experience of ourselves and others." I would not want a counselor who could not or would not help me in this refusal for it is truly a matter of life and death -- mine.

In the process of being counseled, I would certainly like the benefits of careful thinking. The counselor has need of a well developed calculative (logical) thought which can be turned to an analysis of environmental forces and to an analysis of behaviors and their consequences. Beyond logical thought, I would look for a "new way of thinking" in a counselor. This new way of thinking would be manifest by the presence of the deeply thoughtful person himself. Such a counselor would think into "living" experience and would employ the "expanded" reason or "humane" logic which "confirms broadly and deeply, the human content which everyone harbors within himself, seeks in reflection, and finds in the realization of his existence." The operation of a combustion engine can be diagrammed and logically described in terms of cause and effect. Fortunately, a human life does not submit to the same predictability and logical explanation as the machine. Living is circular and spiraling. The solution of one life dilemma simply opens
the possibilities for further puzzles, and surprises. Real living is to stand successively on the edge of ever deeper and more perplexing abysses. To "understand" any given human problem means, among other things, to become aware of a greater context of which the original problem exists as only one aspect. Humane thinking, in contrast to deductive thinking, always has the "end in sight" insofar as the "end" is also the "beginning". Saying this another way: deductive thinking aims at conclusions, finality, proof. Humane (circular) thinking is aware of constant beginnings, aims at realization, deepened experience, living meaning, and invites personal leaps into the unknown. In my view, the authentic counselor would be competent in both calculative and humane thinking and would realize the bigotry of defending either at the expense of the other. I would avoid the counselor who worked only on the basis of feeling. He would be as useless to me as the counselor who championed reason and expressed himself only through thinking, excluding emotion or feeling. Each would only be a fragment of a person and I would be taking a serious risk of distortion at their hands. Authentic human response rests on the unity of feeling and thought, not on their separation. Counseling which is not built on authentic humane responsiveness is either dangerous or ineffectual (or both).

I would like my counselor to be a highly skilled group leader, to the point of being a guru and having charismatic qualities. I would hope that he had great skill in divining the specific potentialities for growth in me and then would patiently awaken me to these and steadily work for their realization. I would also appreciate him immensely if he could do this without incurring psychological indebtedness. That is, I would want to become progressively less dependent on him rather than more so that in time I might even surpass him in this or that way and he would not seek revenge, feel jealous, ask for respect, or demand obedience. It would mean a great deal to me if he did nothing for me that I was capable of doing for myself.

If he took me into a group for which he was leader, then I would expect to participate in certain learnings and experiences which I will try to describe for you. First of all, I would like to have revealed for me the depth of my intent to learn. He might speak as follows:

Try to approach whatever happens in this group (and in yourself) in the spirit of "What can I learn from this?" "How can this experience enable me to be more open, more
responsible, more effective in my relationships with others?"

Your interpersonal exchanges with others will let you know how you affect them and how they affect you. "How can what is going on here deepen my understanding of what you are thinking, feeling and doing and deepen your understanding of what I am thinking, feeling and doing?"

When irritation, hurt feelings, disappointment or discomfort feelings occur, don't ignore, deny, or cover them up. Use uncomfortable feelings as signs that something needs to be understood. Such feelings give you clues that very important messages are either being communicated without the use of words or else tell you that something of great importance to someone is being held in, covered up or disguised. By open discussion of thoughts and feelings, by trying to get at what you (and others) really mean, the possibility for continuing growth is kept alive.

I imagine that I could learn in a group the effect of readily passing judgments. To help me learn this the group leader, through his own actions and his words might communicate:

Try, at first, just to stop passing judgments on others — their ideas, their behaviors, their feelings, their persons. This will be difficult for you have had many years of careful training — both in your family and in your schooling — on how to be a skilled judge. We can begin by becoming aware of labeling. The most frequent judgment labels are: good and bad; right and wrong; and dumb and smart. To use the positive identity label of each of these three pairs is to suck on another person's need for approval. To use the negative label is equivalent to using a sledge hammer (by now you may have a callus sufficient to protect you from the hammer blow — unfortunately, the same callus will have dimmed your own light of awareness to a barely perceptible flicker). See what you can do to put a brake on your inclination to blame. Blaming behavior can be expected of the preschoofer — unfortunately in many persons it continues to develop and reaches full blossom in adulthood. Try asking other group members to help you catch your own "blaming" remarks. Passing judgment and blaming are two very successful ways of avoiding the difficult search to understand, to learn, to grow. In place of "Who is at fault here?" try to substitute "What is happening here?", and try to give your own thoughts and feelings to others while listening to theirs. More than any other single behavior, judging reduces your powers of listening and understanding. Try remembering that like the Judge in Genet's Balcony you can only be a perfect judge if you have before you a person who is perfect
for condemnation.

In a group, I would expect to become clearer about the process of understanding -- what is understanding, how do we understand, how can understanding be developed? From the leader, I listen for clues like:

Try to replace "explaining" and "interpreting" with understanding. Try to see and hear each person in the group as he is, not as you would like him to be or as you think he should be. Try to become aware of your own thoughts and feelings about yourself, others, and ideas and events in the group interaction and put your thoughts and feelings into words so that others can understand what your views are and how you experience each of them and experience being in the group.

Learn to paraphrase or "feed-back" to a speaker what you have heard him say. This way you can check on the sameness of what is said and what is heard and do not have to depend upon the assumption that you have heard what he has said. When someone asks you if you understand what they have said, avoid saying yes or no but learn to feed the message back to them. Start your feedback statements with "What I understand is ..." or "The message I got is..." Do not explain or argue or interpret. Understand. If you must start twisting what the other has said to coincide with your own pre-conceptions or needs, just hope that the speaker is perceptive enough to scream at you; or you are perceptive enough to admit your own confusion and then start over. Again, do not explain. Do describe. Describing is saying "This is what I feel..." or "What I hear you saying is..." and then proceeding to describe just what you have heard and not what you imagine or think the speaker should have said. Most of all describing is not giving reasons for what has been said or done.

It is through shared feeling and mood that individuals are bonded together. Thus I would choose a group counselor who was himself capable of deep feelings, sensitive to his own and others' feelings, and who had developed an ability to elucidate, accept and confirm the mood and feelings of another person. It is through shared fellow-feelings that we come together in friendship, experience intimate relationships and manage to survive cruel and difficult times. Felt-meanings are more primary and fundamental than thought-meanings. Bodily meaning is essentially felt-meaning. As you may be aware, there is a vast difference between feeling love and thinking about love; about feeling sad and contemplating sadness. Feelings are never wrong, invalid, or unreal. How feelings are expressed through words, silence and action is often misleading, inaccurate or confusing, but the actual feelings themselves are real, valid and true for the person who experiences them. It is through being with another person who is
open to his own felt-meanings and open to the felt-meanings of another that I can discover and make explicit my own feelings. This would be an absolutely important part of my relationship with a counselor. There are few learnings more important in human living than learning to hear the felt-meanings of others; learning to be in touch with your own; and learning to express them accurately and spontaneously. This I would like to learn from my counselor. Many life decisions -- from trivial ones such as how to spend ten dollars to such as important ones as whom to marry, what career to choose, and whether or not to believe in a God -- don't work out as a result of unstated, confused or conflicting feelings. Nearly all human conflict rests on unresolved and unshared feelings. Daily misunderstandings frequently stem from unstated feelings. Feeling one way and speaking another destroys the very foundation of human trust.

I would ask my counselor to help me stop saying "We all feel..." for that "We" is non-existent. The "we" in "we all feel" is a disguised play for power. Just think for a moment, who is referred to by the "We" here? Is it a collection of I's? Or is it "I", the speaker imagining that everyone else thinks or feels the same way I do? Or is the "we" not-me and not-you in the singular sense? Upon thinking into the matter, "We" in this case turns out to be no one. I would also ask his help in laying open the inauthenticity of saying "One says". Here again a bit of thinking will reveal that the "One" in "One says" is at best an evasive tactic. When I say, "One would think", just who is the "One"? Is it really a round about way of saying "I"? Or is it you? Probably neither. "One" in this usage is a close relative to the distant "They". Don't "we" all know that "one" says "they" say? In these instances, I would ask my perceptive counselor to trap me, if necessary, into realizing that "I" and only "I" am able to feel what I feel, think what I think and do what I do.

I would ask of my counselor that he be personally present. Being personally present, being in the present, presence and presentness are all related concepts. Without going into detailed discussion of these inter-related ideas, I can say that the most important events in human relationships occur in the present. What is important in human experience is what is going on right here, right now. This is not to deny that every event and every
person has a biography, nor to ignore that as human beings we are, until death, projected into the future. It is to say that what is, what is no longer, and what is not yet, can only be grasped by me in each moment of present existence. Many persons spend much of the energies of their own life trying to avoid this fundamental fact of existence. As everyday talk has it, they "live in the past", or "plan for the future" using grotesque means to ignore that each moment of life is lived in presentness. The past is a graveyard and the future is not yet here. Becoming anchored more firmly in the here-and-now has practical consequences such as expanded awareness, spontaneity and the experience of being released from ghosts of the past and bogey-men of the future. The insufficiency of the hypothetical is revealed. "If such and such were the case, then..." This is called the case of the BIG IF. Examining such a statement reveals that the situation which is being referred to does not exist. "If mother were here, then things would be better." The BIG IF brings a ghost into the picture for mother isn't here! Such a statement is a good clue to the fantasy character of the speaker's talk. Professors are fond of setting up fantastic (fantasy) hypothetical situations (the more BIG IFs, the better) and then seducing willing students into absurd guessing games. The whole procedure is a hoax anyway, for the Professor usually has his answer ready before he ever starts the game.

In human relations, the BIG IF is an indication of an inability or unwillingness to get in touch with and directly express concrete experience, feelings and thoughts. The perceptive counselor can help clients to focus on what is actually happening in and between individuals as it is happening. He can focus on what is being said (remember that this does not imply passing judgment on what is being said, at least not before there is common understanding) he can focus attention on non-speech communication--who is looking at whom, what facial expressions are occurring, postures in the group, body-movements, sighing, coughing, blinking, etc. As attention is increasing directed to the ongoing process and toward behavior actually taking place in the counseling group, the irrelevancy of BIG IF strategies become more and more apparent. What "used to be" or what "might be" is replaced by what is.
Presence is made up of many concrete present behaviors. Presence is destroyed by drifting away through innattention, daydreaming, disagreeing, or introducing hypothetical material. One of the most effective methods to employ in destroying present-ness is to tell stories. "A funny thing happened to me yesterday..." This removes the focus of talk to another time (yesterday) and excludes your listeners from actual experience (they weren't with you--there would be little basis for telling your story if they had shared the same experience). Of course if you are an apt story teller you may manage to keep the attention of the group until a better or more aggressive story teller takes the focus away from you. This makes you good competition for the television or comic books, but most certainly disqualifies you as a perceptively relating human being.

I would want to be with a counselor who attuned himself to me through listening, looking and responding to me spontaneously and genuinely, right here, right now. Counseling requires a firm commitment to that basic human request: be with me.

It is quite important to me that serious conversations in which I participate (and counseling is serious conversation) are carried out in the spirit and manner of dialogue. Dialogue has as its purpose genuine understanding. In dialogue persons speak and listen in the following spirit:

I confirm you as you are and as you are becoming. I give myself to you in deep listening and with the most absorption of which I am capable. I will use my eyes, my ears, and my imagination to understand what you say, what you feel, what you think, what your life is like, and what you are in your very essence. During these moments I will not judge you as wrong, I will not (s)mother you with approval, nor will I place an apology between us that would block our coming together in common understanding. The foundation of dialogue is trust and I will place trust between us in every way I can. I will step to close the distance between us so that our lives can stand in firm contact, one with the other. When I speak to you it is with my whole being so that my words and my actions yield over immediately without lie what I think and what I feel. I realize that genuine dialogue depends upon both of us being able to believe that whatever each speaks is spoken without reservation and without deception. I realize that our contact as two existing persons depends upon each being received by the other as that person which only he can be. When semblance comes between us then we are lost to one another.

Seeming is the enemy of dialogue while being is its essence. Indeed, there are so many enemies of dialogue. For example, debate.
In debate one person is the bull's eye for another and words are sharpened darts which one person throws at and through another. Dialogue tries to understand, debate tries to defeat. Dialogue includes, debate denies. In dialogue relationship is mutual; in debate mutuality is displaced by authority. Dialogue points to common ground; debate turns up winners and losers. The principle of dialogue forms the heart of the counseling relationship.

Now I will approach a beginning understanding to counseling from another quarter: "Who are the people who seek counseling?" My answer depends upon the context which is under discussion, but I will describe a few of the individuals who are recipients of counseling. There are, especially in schools, many persons who are trying to arrive at educational and career plans. Such an individual is asking, in his own way, "Where do I go next, what do I want to do with my life?" Then, there are people who are doing alright but would like something better from life. Perhaps a more rewarding job, perhaps more joy in their marriage, perhaps more rewarding relationships with their children, even an urge to find a creative outlet. And youngsters chafing under the confines of school, in conflict with parents, having difficulty with friends and age-mates. Persons with handicaps -- accident victims, health disabilities, defects such as blindness, deafness, retardation often seek counseling in attempts to compensate for their disabilities, to learn different ways of working and living, and developing other potentials. Rehabilitation and re-educating agencies depend heavily on counseling.

Marriage counseling is a rapidly growing profession. Some couples seek counseling to improve an already satisfactory marriage -- this is particularly true with regard to the sexual and leisure aspects of marriage. Sex therapies have developed rapidly in the last two decades. The range of accepted sexual practices has expanded greatly since the second world war (I don't imply that the war had much to do with the sexual explosion) and adults both married and unmarried seek counseling in order to reconstruct their sexual identities, learn new methods of sexual expression, and work out conflicts, feelings of guilt and inadequacy which have been developed toward sex during their earlier life.
Other couples seek counseling in efforts to maintain or "save" their marriage. Yet others are candidates for counseling as they finally resolve to dissolve their marriage.

Another group of persons who are increasingly being served by counselors are older people (euphemistically called, "senior citizens"). Older individuals are subject to isolation and feelings of loneliness, uselessness and fears of disease and death. Counselors working with older persons work to create groups which provide friendship, warmth, caring, self help and often are instrumental in providing meaningful work and leisure activities.

People of all ages who find themselves in conflict with others who are important to them bring their difficulties to counselors. This includes conflict over religious beliefs, sexual behavior, values in life, work aspirations, and even such matters as difference of opinion about customs of dress, eating habits and child rearing. Few individuals have learned how to differ with someone who is personally important without suffering a fear of loss of affection or guilt over their own differing behavior. Again the counselor faces the task of sorting out feelings and making these explicit.

Many young adults experience difficulty in forming a personal identity. Much in our way of living teaches averageness, alienates the person both from himself and from others, and exerts great pressures toward conformity and standardization. The task of arriving at a sense of personal significance becomes increasingly more complex and difficult with each passing decade. The possibilities for anonymity are legion, the possibility for significant personal existence is small indeed. Since anonymity is a living death, it is no wonder that young persons turn to counselors who can offer at least comfort and sometimes aid in developing a style of life which holds personal significance.

These few instances which I have mentioned may help point out that counseling is not confined to a single area of society such as schools or mental health clinics. The counselor addresses
himself to the needs of the individual rather than the needs of the institution or society. He is mindful of institutional needs, to say the least, yet he commits himself to the development and survival of the person. His profession is human contact. Regardless of the setting in which the counselor works, he requires certain common characteristics: a high level of technical competence in human studies, especially psychology, philosophy, anthropology and neuro-sensory function; a well-developed capacity for warmth and intimacy; a carefully examined and deeply understood concept of self; a confidence based on knowledge and trust of self and trust and acceptance of others; a unity of body and thought which permits spontaneous responsiveness to any situation as it is experienced; and, finally, both a willingness and the ability to be involved with other persons in close personal relationships. The counselor is a specialist in human growth and expansion. He is aware that life is, to a great extent, what an individual makes it and that most individuals develop only a fraction of their potential. He is also aware that institutional life is generally opposed to personal growth and at times it is necessary to take an activist role in politics and administration in order to resist, modify or remove economic, political and regulatory barriers to personal growth. Basically he is committed to the belief that the only true therapy for any society is a person so unified in mind, spirit and body that he will not consent to betrayal -- his own or another person's.

I am often asked (and I remember asking the same question myself) "what methods should a counselor use?" I now believe that there are two ways in which this question is a mistaken one. Notice the word "should". Putting the question this way (shouldistically) implies that 1) there is a best method or methods, and 2) someone, from his throne on high, knows which they are and can make their authoritative knowledge available to others. I have not found either 1 or 2 to obtain. The person who champions a method, if he is truly skilled in his method, is actually championing himself. Others who take up his method exclusively as
their own are camp-followers. By this I do not mean that there are no techniques in counseling, for indeed there are many. I do mean that single techniques such as reflecting, open-ended questioning, arriving at a family constellation or confronting do not constitute methods of counseling for the "method" is the man.

There is an ancient saying that "If the wrong man uses the right method, the right method works in the wrong way." This stands in sharp contrast to the strong modern belief in the "right method" regardless of the man who applies it. I believe that it is more correct to say that nearly everything depends on the man and little or nothing on the method. Especially is this so in matters pertaining to human contact, relationships and problems. A "method" is but a path, the direction a person takes. Actions, including speech and silence, are the expressions of personality and reveal the true essence of a person. A man, directly expressed, is method insofar as what he expresses or reveals is essential to his own being. Beyond this, adopting a method is to slip into pretence, seeming and affectation. A method adopted by an individual for the purpose of "counseling" another is something artificially added, rootless and serving the purpose of deception. In this view a method "becomes a means of fooling oneself and of evading what may perhaps be the implacable law of one's being." In sum, about the best I can say is, "you are your method and can become an improved method precisely to the extent which you develop your self."

Is counseling like teaching? Perhaps the most fundamental way that counseling and teaching are similar is that both are essentially concerned with learning. As with the teacher and pupil, so with the counselor and client there is but one single-minded goal, similar in each instance, and that is: to let learning occur. The genuine teacher lets nothing else be learned than learning. The gifted teacher frequently produces the impression that we can learn little or nothing from him, if by "learning" is meant the acquisition of useful information.
He is really ahead of his pupils in only one way -- he must be more teachable than they for only in this way can he learn to let them learn. If he is a true teacher he will be less sure of his ground than they are of theirs and he will possess the rarely earned power of being able to say "I don't know." If the relationships between teacher and pupil and between counselor and client are authentic there is no place for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official. Learning within an authoritative relationship is a mockery for the learner is mainly concerned with living out an imposed system of rights and obligations. At times of extreme authority the only valid possibilities which remain for the learner are to withdraw or go to sleep. In short, both counselor and teacher are assigned the task of facilitating learning -- especially learning how to learn.

Do counselors just work with problems? It is easy to get this impression both by reading what is written about counseling and by listening to counselors talk. Yet, this may be a rather mistaken assumption. How so? Buckminster Fuller has remarked that people are "overbuilt". By this he means that each of us possesses, in nearly every dimension of humanness which we might examine, a potential far beyond what is required in day to day existence. In counseling it often occurs that a person grows far beyond himself due to the discovery and development of some heretofore unknown potential. This is of great importance even though it can be easily overlooked or assumed. To repeat, a person can grow beyond a previous limit. This can be thought of as transcendent behavior. To transcend is to go beyond -- to grow over limits. What does this have to do with problems? Just this -- problems are, in one sense, insoluble. A person is a dynamic, self-regulating (cybernetic) gestalt. Each expression of the person is a sign of the inherent polarities of that gestalt. To experience fear reveals the potential of feeling courageous. There could be no such thing as a smile if we did not also have the possibility of not smiling. What we refer to as problems are in actuality expressions of the constantly changing polarities which we are. Personality is this very interplay of polarities as expressed through our actions, thoughts, feelings, dreams, etc.
Problems are not solved -- they are outgrown. The life state of the individual is just this growth (or learning). Remaining stuck, static or predictable is the death state. The counselor as a promoter of growth requires a talent for letting learning occur, letting things happen and respecting that heart-felt human cry: "let me be (be-ing is be-coming)".

As a final word about problems and growth, I offer the observation that the possibility of new growth frequently arises from the most unexpected or obscure quarters. Lives have been radically changed from a discovery which began in a dream, a casual remark, a long-forgotten event, a severe crisis, or an oddly-put question. The discovery of fundamental potentials seldom occurs in the course of routine daily thought and action or as the result of deliberate willing. Personal growth takes us from the known to the unknown. In this process, "problems" vanish and are replaced by new limits which are in turn transcended, etc.

Do counselors need to be informed about tests and testing? In my opinion -- yes, on two counts. A counselor who is technically competent about tests -- how they are constructed what their intended purposes are, what the relationship between test score and behavior is, the extent of their reliability and validity -- is in a position to decide when testing is appropriate and when it is not. If he is not technically informed about tests and testing, then he is no better off than most users of tests and will continue to contribute to the mushrooming nightmare of widespread testing. Most tests have such limited validity (in many cases, none) and such limited reliability that they should not be used. It is probably safe to say that ninety percent of the decisions which are based on test scores are mainly for the benefit of efficient institutional operation and are actually harmful to the individual about whom a decision is made. The point I am making here is that no counselor can hope to intelligently intervene in this process of betrayal unless he is at least as informed as the test advocates. Sadly, a large number of counselors are themselves rather uninformed about the technology of testing and are advocates of excessive testing.
A second need for sophistication about testing among counselors is that there are occasional situations in which testing is justified. The three most common are: instances of neuro-sensory dysfunction; situations where it is possible to employ direct behavioral tests such as typing tests, numerical operations tests and motor skills tests (running, jumping, strength, etc.) and learning situations where certain projective tests can be used to initiate imaginative productions, and stimulate thought associations especially in relation to problem solving.

Intelligence tests, widely used in schools, have produced far more damage to individuals than benefit. I imagine that intelligence tests will eventually be relegated to the large basket which gathers together man's numerous philosophical and technical mistakes. The basic mistake about intelligence is simply that it is not a what (a substance); rather what we call intelligence is a mode of functioning in the same way that imagination, remembering, feeling and dreaming are. It is a highly valued mode in our culture but it does not lend itself to measurement. Continuing misapplication of measures of intelligence have led to a compounding of error with tragic consequences for an enormous number of individuals.

Another question which arises early in counselor education is "Does working with children require different skills and knowledge than working with adolescents and adults?" To be an effective counselor means to be cognizant of both the person and environment with which the person interacts. At different stages of personal development individuals certainly do express themselves differently (a three-year old does not have to make a career decision and a seventy year old does not wonder guiltily if masturbation will spoil his chances for sexual adequacy in marriage). Correspondingly the environments of children, adolescents and adults also differ significantly. A child's growth needs gear into an intense, immediate and body-need dominated horizon. The adult gears his life into economic, political and societal activities which are not part of the child's living world. To be competent, a counselor must possess both a thorough knowledge of
the developmental behaviors of the age-client he mainly works with and must understand the living environment of his clients. In the sense of having knowledge about the environments and behaviors of different age clients, the preparation of counselors is necessarily variable. On the other hand, and in my view, more importantly, the development of self which is required for sensitive, adequate human response is no different due to the fact that one chooses to work primarily with one age group rather than another. Whether I choose to work with small children, adolescents, young adults or octogenarians, I will be effective in each case just to the extent that I am spontaneously responsive, possess empathic understanding, have a capacity for warmth and intimacy and to the extent that I am a deeply centered person who cares and can listen. Persons of all ages exist through their experiences. If I am serious about counseling them I must learn the skill of tracking with another person's concrete experiencing no matter what his age, sex, intelligence or mental state.

Basic human needs: intimacy, inclusion, significance and competence are manifest at all ages. No age has a corner on loneliness; "death conquers all"; joy lingers in the breast of every human being; no single person in the world hungers for betrayal and each and every person everywhere longs to be "somebody".

I feel a fear rise up in me when I hear a person say, "I can only work with adults", or "I want to help children", for in those words lies a clue to an undeveloped portion of the speaker's personality. Counseling requires wholeness of being.

What about theories of personality and counseling? A theory of personality is an attempt to formulate or represent significant aspects of human experience. Many years ago Sears remarked that in personality theorizing there is no "right or wrong", since no theory of personality has clearly proven itself to be more useful or correct than all others, then the choice of theory remains primarily a matter of convenience. For the beginning student two steps seem helpful to me; first, an acquaintance with the range of personality theories, and, secondly, absorption in a particular
theory. To aid in the first task, I know of no more helpful sources than the twin volumes by Hall and Lindzey.\textsuperscript{9, 10}

The choice of single theory in which a person can become absorbed seems to me to depend upon two considerations. First, the personal inclination of the individual undertaking the study. Whether, for example, he is scientifically or philosophically oriented, whether he is introverted or extraverted, and whether his interest is serious or casual. Secondly, the use a person wishes to put his theorizing to will partly determine his choice of theory. The person who wishes to study the development of thought in the young child will probably work from a different theoretical base than the individual who wishes to examine the problems of man-machine interfacing in space technology. Study of insanity requires a different theoretical base from the psychology of dog-training and so on.

As I understand counseling and therapy, a theory of personality which is useful to me must necessarily take into account the process of experiencing. What is experiencing? What are the modes of experiencing which characterize human existence? How can we understand inter-experiencing? What factors in daily living validate and invalidate experiencing? Etc.,

The best known sources of a personality theory based on human experience are Combs and Snygg\textsuperscript{11}, Rogers\textsuperscript{12}, and Gendlin.\textsuperscript{13} I find Gendlin's formulations especially helpful in that they seem more closely related to the conduct of counseling and therapy than are other theories with which I am acquainted.

A personality theory should "fit" human experience as it is for you, it should aid you in the work you choose, and it should spur you on to further thinking and research. With these criteria in mind, proceed.

Is counseling therapeutic? My answer to this question is yes. I regard any human activity which heals or brings man closer to a state of wholeness to be a therapeutic activity. There are various therapies: music therapy, art therapy, psychotherapy, bibliotherapy, dance therapy, medical therapy. Remember that Plato's therapy for society was the mature adult who was
so developed and capable of wisdom that he would not consent to his own betrayal, would not betray others, and thus would be the therapeutic foundation upon which the good society could be built. The central core of all therapy is listening in its broadest and deepest sense. Counseling rests on this basic skill also.

The fully committed counselor takes up counseling as a way of life. He accepts that man's clearest hope for survival rests in his potential for growth until death. He conducts his own life in such a way as to promote growth in those who seek him out. He has discovered that many say yes out of fear of the consequences of saying no and say no out of fear of the consequences of saying yes. The committed counselor says yes to growth -- his own and others -- and no to those individuals and circumstances which limit and prohibit growth. Rather than avoiding unpleasantness at any cost or seeking average happiness as the main goal in life, he accepts both pain and joy as constant ingredients in a responsive life.

Is counseling an art or a science? This question -- often asked and endlessly debated -- represents a spurious exercise in game-playing. One of the sicknesses of the positivistic mind is the production of irreconcilable "couples" such as sane/crazy, teacher/taught, artist/scientist, saint/sinner, judge/judged, which are used as a basis for self definition in career and social enhancement. The answer to the art/science dichotomy in counseling is: both. Without man there would be no science and there would be no art. The constant aim of healing (and genuine counseling is healing) is to grow man whole. The very disturbance many people suffer with is splitting. One aspect of their being is split off from other aspects. One partner of their particular "couple" has taken over. Scientific thinking and artistic expression are both intrinsic elements in the fulness of human living. Counseling directly engages human living. Science should never guide the counselor but the counselor needs scientific methods to examine and verify some of his procedures.
Just what texts to choose for the first course in counseling always presents me with more than a small dilemma. I realize that the majority of the students in a first course intend to become teachers or counselors in public schools. I also realize that counseling in British Columbia is little understood and held to be of questionable value by large numbers of post-secondary students (mainly due to the crummy counseling they have received themselves). A great many teachers and school administrators hold views toward counseling which are neither informed nor encouraging. Further, there are some students in each beginning course who have no intention of working in school settings but do plan to eventually become social workers, psychologists, community workers or therapists of one kind or another and so wish to begin developing the skills and attitude of the counselor.

Presumably all students entering the beginning course do commonly share the desire to begin skill development and to develop a general acquaintance with the scientific and philosophical foundations of counseling or therapeutic psychology. This presumption is incorrect in at least two instances: occasionally a student will already have acquired foundational knowledge, attitude and skills and wishes to do more advanced work; occasionally a student enrols in the course for less authentic reasons -- he has heard that I am not known to be a strict marker, he "needs" the course to fulfil the requirements of this or that program and couldn't care less about counseling, or he simply didn't know what course would fill out a program and this one fell at the correct time slot and carried an adequate number of units.

Along with these and other sundry considerations is my own bias that many persons go into counseling for the wrong reasons: they want to "help" people (a desire which is too often a projection of an unresolved puzzle within their own psyche); they have heard that it is high-paying job (in the case of teachers, counseling is often seen as a mid-step between teaching and administration); or counseling is a side-line which they will use if their first choice in work doesn't work out. Such students usually grow very little in a course and may even retard the development of more serious students.
Another very important concern of mine is that in human relations (teaching, counseling, therapy, social work) it is the fundamental attitude which the individual holds toward other persons and toward himself which determines his effectiveness. This is a restatement of the belief that each man is his own method, or as Pope had it:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan
The proper study of mankind is man.

With these factors in mind, I have chosen three books for this year's beginning course in counseling. The first is:


Paraphrasing the authors, their intention in writing this text was to provide theory, research and values for the counselor so that his actions would be relevant to the rapidly changing youth culture. Conceptually, the text is derived from phenomenology, humanistic psychology, existential thought and client-centered (now experiential) theory. In their view, the goal of the counselor is to assist the searching client "achieve an authentic self-actuated existence which sustains the self and is of benefit to his fellow man" and this text represents their efforts to point the developing counselor in that direction.

While both authors have had many years experience as school counselors, the book is sufficiently de-schooled so that it can be read with benefit by the individual who wants nothing to do with school but does wish to learn something of counseling.

The second selection is a short paperback entitled *Coming into Existence* written by a chemical engineer, Raymond Rogers (unrelated to Carl Rogers). It is a personalized account of the difficult and often painful process of attaining genuine personal significance in modern life. The book is organized around the ideas of Prescott Lecky -- one of the most creative thinkers American psychology has known. Lecky was so poorly regarded by his contemporary colleagues at Columbia University that they would grant him neither tenure nor advancement. At the time of his early death in 1941 he had published only two papers and left behind a small collection of unpublished manuscripts.
Yet he is one of the original thinkers whose influence helped to launch the third force movement in psychology. His posthumously published collection of essays, published under the title: *Self-consistency*, has been a source of theoretical inspiration for countless psychologists and therapists. *Coming into Existence* presents Lecky's ideas to a readership now more ready to listen than they were during his own lifetime.

The third selection is by far the most difficult to read. *Being and Education* by Donald Vandenberg is, so far as I am aware, the first attempt in North American publication to examine educational practices in the light of principles of existential phenomenology. While it does not require previous exposure to philosophical thinking, most readers will find it necessary to follow up on some of the references and will quite likely profit by careful discussion with other interested members of the class. I will hold a series of seminars on phenomenology during the winter which will bear directly on various of the concepts which Vandenberg presents. Many students may wonder whatever possessed me to choose this book as required reading in a first course in counseling. Any answer which I can give at this point will probably appear as obscure. I will try one answer anyway.

There is a fairly widespread sentiment (and it seems to be growing) that schooling in North America is essentially destructive to the human spirit. Now, it really makes a difference what you believe about this. Even if you regard this sentiment as non-sense, it is necessary to become aware of the roots of the belief anyway since it is strongly held by some of your own peers, teachers and many social critics. If you *share* in this sentiment, then you may welcome every opportunity to clarify your belief, gather further evidence and construct ways of putting a stop to the destruction. If you are simply unaware of the sentiment, then you yourself are in need of awakening and until this happens you represent a danger to children. In Sartrean terms: to murder the hope of a child is to murder the child insofar as his potentialities for being are denied or destroyed. If this is true
for the child it is also true for adolescents and adults. Is it? A careful reading of this book will shed some light on the issues involved in this kind of thinking, will develop the philosophical thought-base of the counselor and will put the reader in touch with educational concepts which are vital in Italy, France and Germany but virtually unknown to the North American student.

In conclusion I leave you with -- first a thought from Kierkegaard:

Two ways, in general, are open for an existing individual: Either he can do his utmost to forget that he is an existing individual, by which he become a comic figure, since existence has the remarkable trait of compelling an existing individual to exist whether he wills it or not: ... Or he can concentrate his entire energy upon the fact that he is an existing individual.  **Concluding Unscientific Postscript**

and, from Camus:

There is, in fact, nothing in common between a master and a slave; it is impossible to speak and communicate with a person who has been reduced to servitude. In stead of the implicit and untrammeled dialogue through which we come to recognize our similarity and consecrate our destiny, servitude gives way to the most terrible of silences. If injustice is bad for the rebel, it is not because it contradicts an external idea of justice but because it perpetuates the silent hostility that separates the oppressor from the oppressed. It kills the small part of existence that can be realized on this earth through the mutual understanding of men. In the same way, since the man who lies shuts himself off from other men, falsehood is therefore proscribed and, on a slightly lower level, murder and violence, which impose definitive silence. The mutual understanding and communication discovered by rebellion can survive only in the free exchange of conversation. Every ambiguity, every misunderstanding, leads to death; clear language and simple words are the only salvation from this death. It is worth noting that the language peculiar to totalitarian doctrines is always a scholastic or administrative language.  **The Rebel**

and, from Berdyaev:

But the "I" is not content with communication with other "I"s in society and the state, in social institutions, communication by means of conditioned signs; it strives for communion with other "I"s, for entrance into genuine existence. All conditional communication relates to the
world of objectivization, it is communication with objects. But the bursting out toward communion is movement beyond objectivization toward true existence. Communion is possible only with an "I" who is "thou" for me, and this demands mutuality, i.e. the activity of "thou". Communion is possible only on the plane of existence, not on that of objectivization.

Solitude and Society

and, in closing, a statement by Martin Buber on the possibility (and it is only a possibility) that you and I may enter into a relationship whereby each of us may release the other to learn:

Can one educate through instruction? Instruction wants to influence the thinking of the pupil, education his being and life. Is it sufficient, as Socrates believed, to awaken the knowledge of the right in him for the right to be realized in his being and life? But even Socrates himself exercised his decisive effect not through what he taught but through his life. It is not the instruction that educates but the instructor. The good teacher educates by his speech and by his silence, in the hours of teaching and in the recesses, in casual conversation, through his mere existence, only he must be a really existing man and he must be really present to his pupils; he educates through contact.

Contact is the primary word of education. It means that the teacher shall face his pupils not as developed brain before unfinished ones, but as being before beings, as mature being before developing beings. He must really face them, that means not in a direction working from above to below from the teacher's chair to the pupils' benches, but in genuine interaction, in exchange of experiences of a fulfilled life with those of still unfulfilled ones. But the latter experiences are no less important than the former. For what is needed is not mere seeking for information from below and giving information from above, also not mere questions from here and answers from there, but genuine dialogue. The teacher, to be sure, conducts and governs this dialogue, but even so he must also enter it with his own person, directly and candidly. This dialogue shall continue into silent being with one another, indeed undoubtedly only here will it first properly culminate. It is this which I call the dialogical principle in education.

A Believing Humanism
BIBLIOGRAPHY


