

## Does Therapy Belong in the Classroom? NO! says one pioneer of 'therapeutic classrooms' who is now trying to undo the damage he helped to create

Parents have discovered that traditional academics have been replaced not only by curricula with humanistic content, but also by curricula that concentrate on students' "feelings" and "group experiences." Today's "therapeutic classroom" teaches students to make choices based on feelings and situations rather than on the traditional code of right and wrong or on their parents' teaching.

Carl Rogers, the American Humanist Association's 1964 Humanist of the Year, developed and led what Senator Sam Hayakawa called the "heresy" that regards "the fundamental task in education as therapy." Rogers' influence is massive. One of his chief disciples was William Coulson who, after 25 years with Rogers, is now trying to explain Rogers' mistakes and undo their damage. The following article from the San Diego Weekly is very revealing.

### An Encounter with Bill Coulson by Jeannette DeWyze

He believed in his mentor, pioneering psychologist Carl Rogers. Now he believes his mentor was wrong.

Who doesn't know who Carl Rogers was? He was the father of "humanistic psychology." He was one of the most famous psychologists of this century. He lived in La Jolla, California, for almost two and a half decades, and he was Bill Coulson's hero.

Who does know who Bill Coulson was? Once upon a time, Coulson was one of Rogers' most shining proteges. As a graduate student, Coulson sought out Rogers, studied with him, and twenty-four years ago, when the great man moved from Wisconsin to San Diego, Coulson packed up his wife and children and moved too. Here Coulson became Rogers' acolyte. He helped Rogers organize his electrifying encounter groups; Coulson led a pioneering effort to revolutionize a major West Coast school system by injecting it with Rogerian concepts. After a while, Coulson and Rogers founded the Center for Studies of the Person in La Jolla, where Rogers presided as chief eminence until his death just this past February. But something happened to Coulson. One day he began to think Rogers had made terrible mistakes. Rogers' ideas were spreading — Coulson had helped make sure of that! — and they were changing people's lives, transforming society. And the more Coulson saw of these changes, the more his conviction grew that these ideas were not merely wrong, but pernicious.

Today it has become Coulson's mission to battle those ideas, to try to limit their influence, to try to amend some of the damage he believes has been wrought by them. This crusade recently took Coulson from his rented house in Linda Vista to Michigan. There, in Lansing, Coulson testified before a state legislative committee conducting hearings into juvenile delinquency prevention. Coulson can guess how he got invited to testify. He says certain black mothers in Detroit who are concerned about their children being murdered in the streets must have heard about him — through the "mothers' network" that Coulson says has quietly sprung



Professor Bill Coulson

up across the country. Some of the Detroit women scraped up the money to pay for his air fare, and he waived any consulting fee. Before the committee, he stood up and preached ideas that would have repulsed Rogers. Parents must tell their children what to do, Coulson argued; it's a horrible mistake to tell youngsters they must "make up their own minds. Culturally, societally, we've got to tell children, 'Yeah, make up your own mind—but by all means, make it up in the right way!' And there are some things we know that are right, and some things that are wrong," Coulson said.

He was supposed to have five minutes, but the committee members' questions engaged him for more than twice that time. He says he walked away satisfied, but the performance was small-time compared to the testimony he gave last fall in Alabama. Coulson's stances led to his involvement there in one of the most important legal cases ever to address the role of religion in public schools. In that case, as they did in another case decided last year in Tennessee. In Tennessee the judge eventually ruled that parents may remove their children from classes that conflict with their religious views. But the Alabama case, which the fundamentalists also won, had far more sweeping significance. The plaintiffs asserted that Alabama state schools were violating the First Amendment to the Constitution by teaching a religion that the fundamentalists called "secular humanism." Any traces of this dogma should be purged from the curriculum (just as Christianity has already been removed), they argued, and textbooks based on secular humanist principles should be banned. It was the Scopes trial turned on its head, and the conundrum continued as the plaintiffs' lawyers called witness after witness who defied the monkey trial stereotypes. Instead of ranting creationists and sermonizing preachers, they included prestigious secular academicians: historians, sociologists, religious scholars, philosophers, and Coulson — whose testimony the *Washington Post* described as "probably most important to the plaintiffs' case." The San Diegan submitted a forty-five page analysis of the questionable textbooks and then spent close to three months in Alabama interviewing fam-

ilies and writing formal case studies about them, conducting scholarly research, and ultimately taking the witness stand for almost four days.

Today the fifty-three-year-old Coulson grins at the irony of his being a white knight for the fundamentalists. Unlike them, he believes in evolution, he points out, and as a devout Catholic, he rejects the notion that the only path to eternal salvation lies in study of the Bible and acceptance of its literal truth. He says when the plaintiffs' attorneys first approached him about testifying for them, he wasn't precisely sure what humanism was, "though I probably would have called myself a humanist, in the old-fashioned sense of a Christian humanist like St. Thomas Aquinas or Erasmus. I was very interested in the humanities," he adds mildly.

He began his own academic career in 1951, studying English at Arizona State University. Coulson's interest in psychology didn't really bloom until a few years after he had graduated, when he got a job counseling Arizona college students with disciplinary problems. These were "troubled kids," he says, and almost instinctively, Coulson sensed he wouldn't succeed very well at helping them if he simply tried to tell them what to do. As part of his psychological readings, he came upon Carl Rogers' seminal work called *Client-Centered Therapy*, a book that not only validated Coulson's instincts, but went considerably beyond them. Rogers' central idea, says Coulson, "was that in fact you don't need to tell people what to do, that they know within themselves, and they're just defending themselves against that knowledge." To break down those defenses, Rogers had developed a style of psychotherapy that refined its Freudian antecedents. Instead of acting as an authority figure whose role was to interpret and influence clients' behaviors, the Rogerian therapist was to be scrupulously, unceasingly "nondirective." He was to listen to whatever the client said, without criticizing or judging the content, but merely signaling his acceptance of all disclosures by nodding, murmuring "I see," or offering other such clues. The therapist further was supposed to "reflect back" the client's feelings, that is, to concentrate empathically on what was being said, then restating to the client the essential feeling that the client was trying to communicate. Using these techniques would supposedly encourage clients to express their attitudes and feelings, from which they would spontaneously gain insight into their problems and take self-initiated steps to correct them. This self-directed action served people better than any externally imposed help, Rogers believed.

This made sense to Coulson, and with the methodology came a "theoretical rationale which happened to dovetail with what I already believed, namely that human beings are well made." Coulson says he already had read some of Freud and B.F. Skinner, and he disliked Skinner's idea that human beings have no inherent "nature" apart from what they're conditioned to have. "I also didn't like the Freudian idea that human beings were fundamentally destructive." He thought instead that



Photo by: Douglas A. Land

Professor Carl Rogers

Rogers was right in thinking "that human nature is essentially trustworthy." Coulson says this jibed with his Catholicism, a position that Coulson bluntly summarizes as being, "God doesn't make junk."

Increasingly interested in a counseling career, he began working in the fall of 1958 toward a doctorate at Notre Dame University, noted for its strong program in the history of philosophy. Eventually, he decided to write his doctoral dissertation comparing the Freudian, Skinnerian, and Rogerian philosophies of human nature, and as part of the research, he journeyed in 1963 to Rogers' stronghold at the University of Wisconsin's Madison campus. "I went to Wisconsin to sit at Carl's feet," Coulson says today.

Impressed by his brilliant young admirer, Rogers obtained for Coulson a very good federal fellowship. "And it ran for two years." That was fortuitous. Though Coulson finished his Notre Dame dissertation in just six months, during that time, Rogers and announced that he was to be a "resident fellow" at the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute (WBSI) in La Jolla, which had been founded in 1958 as a groundbreaking social-science think tank. Since Coulson still had some fellowship income remaining, he was able to follow Rogers to La Jolla. There Coulson first finished his work on a second doctorate (from Berkeley, in psychology) and at the same time assisted Rogers with various projects.

"He was a great man, a very generous man," Coulson says about Rogers. For example, when Coulson's fellowship ran out, he went to Arizona for a while for an internship in clinical psychology at a Phoenix Veterans Administration hospital. But Rogers wanted Coulson to be able to return to La Jolla, so he and WBSI co-founder Dick Farson persuaded Fowler McCormick, heir to the McCormick reaper fortune, to donate money for a study of the philosophy of science. Coulson directed that study (after completing his Arizona internship), and "it essentially paid my salary for two years, while in the meantime I was getting myself established in practice as a psychotherapist." Coulson also eventually organized a dazzling

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conference on the philosophy of science that drew such luminaries as Jonas Salk, Jacob Bronowski, and philosopher-scientist Michael Polanyi to the Salk Institute in March of 1966. Out of that conference, Rogers and Coulson together edited a 1968 book (*Man and the Science of Man*) that was Coulson's first major scholarly achievement. "Out of this really came my career," Coulson says today. "It was typical of Carl that he would encourage people inordinately, and I was one of those people that he inordinately encouraged."

Rogers's patronage of Coulson continued as the philosophy of science project wound down; he next was to edit a multivolume series of studies in "humanistic education." These works advocated what Coulson today calls the "therapeutic classroom" — that is, classrooms that had been revolutionized by Rogers's principles in the same way that those principles had revolutionized counseling sessions.

If that sounds grandiose, well, grandiose developments in Rogers's philosophy had long been taking place; "client-centered therapy" was becoming the "person-centered movement." Coulson says that development first became overt with the 1961 publication of Rogers's famous work, *On Becoming a Person*. Rogers originally had intended to call that book *A Therapist Looks at Psychotherapy* but finally chose the broader title in the hopes of attracting a wider audience; his thinking had expanded beyond the realm of psychiatric professionals. Rogers had come to feel that his view of human nature and the insights he had gained during psychotherapy could — and should — be generalized to much broader areas of human life. If a good therapist didn't need to tell a person what was good for him, why should a parent or a teacher? Rogers asked, and soon he concluded that parents and teachers indeed should not impose direction on their charges. Since the early Fifties, Rogers had been arguing that there was no point in "teaching," in the traditional sense of the word. "Anything that can be taught to another is relatively inconsequential and has little or no significant influence on behavior," he had stated in a 1952 speech at Harvard. "I have come to feel that the only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning."

The ramifications of Rogers's premises rippled further. By the early Sixties, he had begun to argue that traditional institutions in society — the family, schools, business organizations — by trying to force people into certain prescribed behaviors inhibited personal growth, repressed individuals — and did so unnecessarily. If one trusted in the essential goodness of human beings, one would discover that they could act well without being coerced or even cajoled into doing so; they would in fact act better in the context of freedom.

"We knew something very well," says Coulson, speaking for Rogers and his disciples. "We knew how to help people within the limits of the therapeutic hour. And we blew it," he says bitterly. With twenty years' hindsight, Coulson today has come to believe that Rogers made a tragic error in generalizing beyond his therapeutic insights. Coulson says he still believes Rogers was absolutely right about psychotherapy, correct in stating that in therapy, you must refer your decisions "to nothing other than your inner sense of what's right, certainly not to what your mother said or what your father said or what the textbook says, but to how *you* feel about it." But to generalize from that to conclusions about how to get by in life was wrong and unjustified, Coulson contends. "We went from the fine distinctions that can be made about therapy and the scientific evidence that supported it to something that was insupportable. We made it gross," he says.

Certainly, Coulson didn't have such heretical

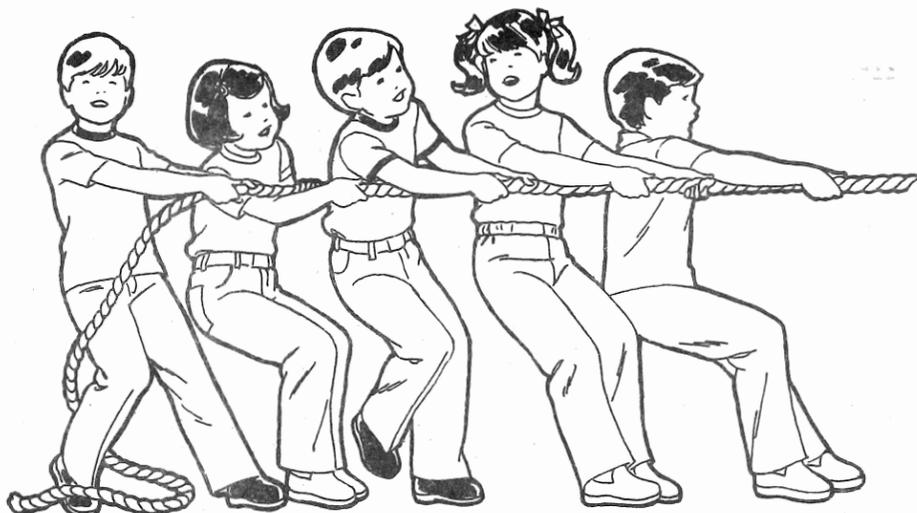


thoughts when he followed Rogers out to La Jolla. Perhaps there were subtle hints that one day he might turn apostate; right from the beginning, Coulson says he had a tendency to pick at his colleagues, to raise uncomfortable questions about discrepancies between Rogers's theories and various practical applications of it. Many times since, Coulson has asked himself how he nonetheless tolerated those discrepancies, and he concludes, unhappily, that his own ambition blinded him. "I was able to establish myself at the right hand of a great man." At Rogers's side research money and scholarly status flowed to him, and Coulson's genuine gratitude to Rogers crippled his critical faculties, he thinks. "I owed him a great deal and granted him a great deal."

So he excitedly settled into life at WBSI, the avant-garde social-science research center founded by Rancho Santa Fe philanthropist Paul Lloyd, SDSU sociologist Bud Crow, and a former graduate student of Rogers's named Richard Farson. The management style at WBSI from the beginning had been fairly democratic, but Coulson says with the arrival of the Rogerians, this philosophy intensified and became perfectionistic. "We tried to purge the institute of its less-than-client-centered elements," Coulson recalls. The entire institute, everyone from the directors to the gardeners, began to gather for soulful encounters, great group marathons in which everything from office supplies to major personnel decisions were debated for hours at a time. For a few years, euphoria was rampant, as government contracts and national attention showered upon the daring social scientists of La Jolla. One early example was the \$23,000 contract from the Navy to study "the predictability of leadership"; by 1967 the institute had netted a stunning \$250,000 grant to study the effects of the "War on Poverty" among San Diego aid recipients.

But along with the achievements, subterranean conflicts among staff members also were building, and by 1968, their eruption tore the institute apart. Rogers and his followers by then had used the democratic forums to urge that the three original WBSI founders relinquish their authority to a committee. They finally did so, but Farson so detested the new arrangement that he almost immediately accepted a job offer elsewhere. Shortly after he left, the non-Rogerians managed to bring in a business manager and other cost-accounting procedures that infuriated Rogers. "We will now be run by cost accountants, just like any reactionary business firm," Rogers railed in a letter to the trustees. Newly drawn bylaws "are the most Hitlerian I have ever seen. They make the Divine Right of Kings look like a weak-kneed sissified theory." Unable to tolerate what he saw as an insult, Rogers announced his resignation.

He and his coterie of followers left for the Center for the Studies of the Person (CSP), which Coulson set up at Rogers's request in the two-story building on Torrey Pines Road that WBSI once had filled. Designed as an apartment



building, the structure had been converted into office space, and the Rogerians set up shop in an old one-bedroom unit next to the pool. "We never wanted to have an imposing building," Coulson says. Then, as now, a receptionist was the sole employee. "Everyone else was an entrepreneur. The idea was never to have any bookkeepers or managers."

"We were so proud of ourselves!" Coulson says today about the infant organization. He told reporters it would cease operations after ten years. Though CSP continues to exist today, Coulson explains the initial rationale. "We didn't believe in institutions — except this one.

in the maelstrom of encountering.

Coulson, who directed the project during its first year, says the nuns formed the first groups even before school had begun, and once classes started, additional encounter workshops were scheduled for the faculty of each school willing to participate. At the college alone, more than twenty separate groups took shape in classes, among departmental colleagues, in the administrative council, the student newspaper staff, the student council. For a minimum of several hours, participants would sit in a circle, face each other and talk. About what? The content might vary dramatically from one group to

## Result of encounter session: "They wouldn't want to teach. They'd want to 'relate.' ... Goodbye academics."

We said, 'Institutions are a bad thing — unless they can be run like ours.' " Each year the members had a new director, whom they proudly called "the nondirector." "You know: nondirective therapy," Coulson says. Titles at CSP actually held little meaning. "You gave yourself whatever title you wanted. So Carl Rogers was a 'resident fellow,' but we had people who were barely out of diapers as 'resident fellows.' Because nobody could tell you what to do. So if you wanted to be 'president of the corporation' or 'chairman of the board,' it was up to you."

Initially, center members were kept busy with research that had begun at WBSI. Most important was a sweeping educational experiment. Stated simply, that experiment was testing Rogers's hypothesis that good things would result if you took a major school system and got virtually everyone in it — administrators, teachers, students — to participate in a sustained, ongoing program of encounter groups. By May of 1967, Rogers had published what amounted to an open challenge to any school system willing to risk this offbeat undertaking, one that he thought would yield such benefits as more creative teaching, more student responsibility, and better communication system-wide. Almost immediately, he got several takers, both in the form of private financial backers and a willing subject: the school system run by the nuns of the Order of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. These 600 sisters, known for their innovative thinking, operated a Los Angeles college, eight high schools, and fifty elementary schools located up and down the West Coast. They volunteered for the project in the summer of 1967 and almost overnight found themselves immersed

another, but here's one example recorded in a facilitator's report:

"The workshop was scheduled for four hours. We planned to send out for dinner and to continue to meet while we ate.

"We got off with a bang: one of the students, who is now doing her student teaching, complained that all her college career she has been required to take courses, ostensibly to learn techniques which will be necessary in her teaching, only to find that the actual course is quite different than the catalog description. 'How can you insist that it is necessary to learn methods of teaching when once we get into class, we find we aren't learning any methods?' She went on this way for a while, repeatedly expressing her resentment while the group listened and tried to help iron it out. The problem really didn't seem capable of resolution; and then she came out with her real resentment: 'Look, it's not courses that are on my mind. What's really bothering me is that I found out my parents don't want me to marry the boy I want. He is Jewish. They have raised me to have good judgment and have said they are proud of my judgment, and now they don't accept my judgment concerning my own happiness.' She wept as she said it, and from that point, the group moved along quite on its own energy.

"At one point in the session, about an hour from our appointed time of conclusion, Lucy [a nun who taught a course in educational methods] said, 'I don't really feel a part of this group — some of you still insist on calling me Sister.' She said it with considerable feeling in her voice, but as she continued to talk about it, seemed to back away from the feeling and

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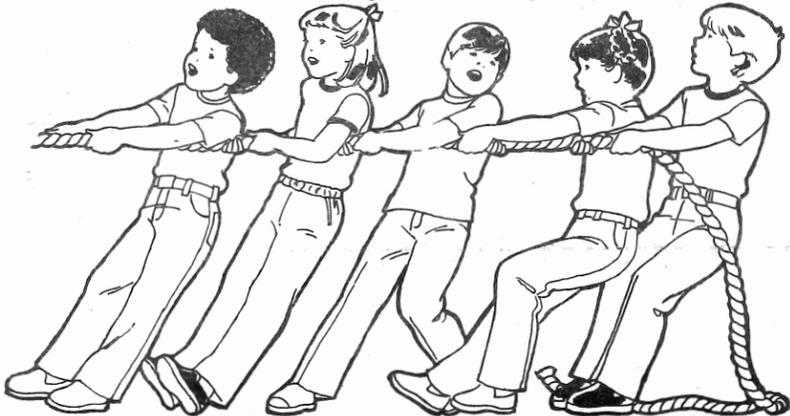
## “Traditional education disempowers children,” Rogers asserted, but Coulson found himself retorting, “that child who goes into life unable to read and write is *thereby* disempowered not empowered. No matter how much he’s in touch with his feelings, he has no power.”

seemed once more, as is her way, to want to be helpful rather than to be helped. Finally she got around to talking about how impossible it is for her to say that she needs anyone, particularly students. ‘I can’t say those words,’ she said.

“It was obvious that she needed all of us but that she couldn’t do anything about it herself. So at that point I put down my dinner, crossed the room and sat beside her, taking her hand and putting my arm around her. She started to weep. Choked up, she said she couldn’t speak and that she was absolutely frightened now of what they would think of her. At that point, one of the male students, who was sitting on the

that in so doing, the nuns had merely traded subservience to the church for subservience to another authority: that of the psychologists. “We came in and told them ‘Whatever you do, don’t let anyone tell you what to do,’” Coulson says wryly.

If the total collapse of the system occurred some years after the psychologists had left, other insidious changes (in Coulson’s eyes) took place immediately at the campus. “The groups destroyed learning,” Coulson now says. “Teachers would come back from one of the encounters, and they’d be fluttering around the ceiling. They wouldn’t be able to teach. They’d



other side of her, also put his arm around her. I went back to my chicken dinner because I knew then that what was necessary was being done; Lucy, who could not say she needed them, was being held in the arms of one of her own students.”

Similar experiences were repeated in other groups, and yet as the three-year project concluded, Coulson felt heartsick. Today he looks back on the experience and says that the actions of the “facilitators” from La Jolla led, if indirectly, to the destruction of that particular religious school system. Immaculate Heart College ceased to exist a few years later; the American Film Institute now owns the buildings that the college once occupied in Hollywood. Just one year after the educational experiment began, several dozen nuns left the convent, and within three and a half years, some 315 Immaculate Heart nuns had announced their desire to leave the religious order (an unprecedented defection in the history of the Catholic Church). Today an “Immaculate Heart community” exists — but it’s a lay organization of Catholics and non-Catholics, men and women, married and single, that has no official status within the church.

Coulson does concede that other social and religious forces had begun to destabilize the community before Rogers’s psychological shock troops ever arrived. The nuns had been talking about finding “new and experimental ways of living,” in accordance with Vatican II, and Coulson thinks the intensive encounter groups in one sense spurred the nuns to act on their rebellious feelings. He also thinks, however,

want to ‘relate.’ They’d tell students about what they’d experienced, and everybody would start crying. Why? ‘Because it’s so beautiful.’ Good-bye academics.”

By 1972, a year after the project ended, Coulson felt sufficiently troubled by the experience that he left La Jolla to accept a job teaching at Arizona State. He says he was thinking at that point, “If we know this better way for people to relate, and in relating in that way, they give up their former commitments, they abandon their promises to remain together, to work together. If they want to overthrow traditions of thousands in favor of standing, traditions of scholarly work in favor of this better idea, and then we go away and aren’t there any longer to help them realize this new dream, have we really done the right thing by them?”

Coulson says Rogers’s answer at that point was still an unequivocal affirmation. In fact, Rogers went on to undertake similar experiments in five other major settings (including the Louisville, Kentucky, public school system), all of which ultimately failed. Coulson says Rogers wrote a chapter analyzing that “pattern of failure” in his 1983 book, *Freedom to Learn for the 80’s*, a pattern that Coulson says Rogers took “as a reflection on the intransigence of the administrators or owners of these institutions.” Rogers wrote that Immaculate Heart College went under, for example, because “wealthy contributors” cut off support when they were disturbed by “striking evidence of a definitely democratic organization — making its own rules, in defiance of authority, encouraging students to be self-directed learners, encouraging

self-discipline, rather than discipline by external authority.” Coulson says, “In all cases, he was able to explain it on some basis other than that we had a bad idea.” But Coulson felt, in contrast, “that you can’t say you’re having an experiment if it can’t go wrong. If every experiment that you do has to prove out your theory, then that’s not science, that’s faith.”

Before leaving for Arizona, Coulson had written a book in an attempt to sort out his feelings about what had happened in the Immaculate Heart system. He says that if you read that book (*Groups, Gimmicks, and Instant Gurus*) today, you can see the confusion in it. While parts of the book extol the wonders of encounter groups, by the end, Coulson is sounding unmistakable alarms about the destructiveness inherent in such encounters. Coulson says Rogers didn’t overtly criticize the work, “But when I would press him a little bit to find out what he thought of it, he would say, ‘Well, I don’t see things the way you do.’” Rogers also never again referred any more work to Coulson. “Why would you support somebody who thinks differently from you, if you’re interested in furthering your own cause?” Coulson says. But rather than demanding that Coulson revise his thinking to conform to Rogerian orthodoxy, Rogers merely urged Coulson to resolve his ambivalence. “He would tell me ‘You’ve got to take a stand. You can’t go back and forth.’”

And at Arizona State, Coulson says he was confronted with more evidence that tended to push him in one direction — away from Rogers’s doctrines. He says a disturbing proportion of his social science students could hardly read or write. Yet these students were the products of the kind of classroom that Coulson’s “humanistic education” series had been promoting. That series had argued that traditional academic disciplines should be abandoned because they weren’t honest; they were based on an unequal distribution of power and authority. “Traditional education disempowers children,” Rogers asserted, but Coulson found himself retorting, “that child who goes into life unable to read and write is *thereby* disempowered, not empowered. No matter how much he’s in touch with his feelings, he has no power.”

By the end of 1976, the Coulson family returned to La Jolla, and another development reinforced Coulson’s growing convictions. On a whim, the family formed a Dixieland jazz band that began its career by appearing on television’s *Gong Show* and eventually performed everywhere from Disneyland to the Kennedy Center. Coulson says that experience made a mockery of the notion that democratic, nondirective processes worked best in all areas of life. “The first time, I tried letting everyone pick which music they wanted to play, and we played seven different songs, I realized, ‘This isn’t going to work,’” he jokes.

He continued with his psychotherapeutic

practice and retained his affiliation with CSP, though you could hardly tell it from the article (entitled “Don’t Coddle the Piano Player”) he published in *San Diego* magazine ten years ago. That article didn’t attack any leaders in the Rogerian child-rearing movement by name (such as “Parent Effectiveness Training” developer Tom Gordon, another former Rogers graduate student), but it took broad swipes at the phenomenon — and emphatically argued the opposite: that parents and will must preach their values; that they “must be missing to be seen as bad guys from time to time, if children are to develop discipline.” Coulson says some people misinterpreted the article and thought he was advocating the repression of children (perhaps understandably, since the article was filled with one example after another of parents of famous musicians who had taken strong measures to make their offspring stick with their musical studies). But Coulson insists, “I’m not advocating beating on kids, and I’m not saying children don’t have free will.” He says he was instead trying to attack the increasingly conventional wisdom “that nobody has any right to tell anybody what to do, including mothers and fathers and children.” Coulson mentions the book about children’s rights written several years ago by WBSI’s Dick Farson, who happened to be Coulson’s next-door neighbor at the time. “He [Farson] had this idea, as I recall, that children should be able to do what they’re ready to drive the car. And all the neighbors said, ‘Watch out. When his kids get ready, we’re not coming out the door!’” Coulson laughs at that memory but adds his earnest disagreement with the notion of allowing children unbridled free choice. “I think we have to charm our children into doing the right thing, because otherwise, somebody else is going to try to charm them into doing the wrong thing.”

Coulson made a point of deliberately distributing that *San Diego* magazine article to the CSP membership, but he got virtually no response to it. It was several years later, in 1981, that Coulson finally sufficiently outraged the membership to prod them into action. That occurred when the *San Diego Tribune* published an article on San Diego’s status as a capital of the “human potential movement” and ran an accompanying iconoclastic interview with Coulson, identified as “a human-potential movement dropout.” Coulson recalls, “At that point, I got called in by the members [of CSP] for a kind of a trial. We didn’t have an apparatus for kicking anybody out, but it was strongly suggested that if I couldn’t be loyal to whatever we’d become, I should withdraw.” Today he still bristles a bit at the memory. “We did not set CSP up to promote person-centeredism. We set it up to study the person. But they said, ‘Anybody who can’t promote the psychology of the person really ought to consider whether or not they belong here.’” And Coulson says he really had to agree: “That was when we went north.”

He and his family took refuge on a seventy-four-acre ranch they had acquired near Comptche in Mendocino County. They could afford to do this because Coulson by then had won a half-time position at San Diego’s United States International University (USIU); since the fall of 1981, Coulson has returned from his ranch in order to teach for two quarters out of the year. In addition he has supervised several doctoral dissertations every year from his ranch and devoted his spare time to writing. By 1984 that work had turned increasingly to concentrate on the tobacco industry.

Around then, Coulson heard that the Tobacco Institute had prepared a booklet called “Helping Youth Decide” and was distributing it free to interested schools and other organizations. Coulson was immediately suspicious; he knew that the tobacco industry depends for

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knew that the tobacco industry depends for most of its long-time customers upon people who begin smoking during adolescence, yet the booklet was being touted as something that would result in young people not smoking. As soon as he heard about the booklet, Coulson says, bells went off. "The very first paper I wrote when I arrived in La Jolla in 1964 was a paper called 'How to Talk to Your Teen-ager,' and I remember only the first line, which was, 'Don't talk. Listen.' So when I heard about the booklet, I said, 'I bet I know what that is. That's what I was writing in '64. That's what [Parent Effectiveness Training founder] Tom Gordon made his full-time profession out of -- intimidating parents into silence, in the name of their children's development.'" Reading the booklet confirmed to him, "This is Rogers and Coulson, via Gordon -- but it's coming from the Tobacco Institute," a twist that revolted him. Coulson subsequently flew to Washington, D.C., and met with various health officials, including Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who agreed that the tobacco industry's booklet was contemptible. Coulson's personal verdict was swift. He concluded that the booklet's underlying strategy of teaching parents to tell children, nonjudgmentally, that they must make up their own minds about cigarette smoking leaves them completely vulnerable to unabashed arguments that smoking is good -- that is, cigarette industry advertisements.

Coulson was therefore upset when he learned that California state school officials had decided to distribute the tobacco industry's pamphlets. In 1985 he both wrote to and met with state school administrators but ultimately was told that they saw nothing wrong with the pamphlet. "It turns out that decision-making has been touted in California schools for the last ten years," Coulson says; he says sex- and drug-education programs have been based on this principle that one must not tell young people what to do but instead should teach a general methodology for evaluating and deciding about things. "Drug education is just beginning to change now, partly through Nancy Reagan and her Just Say No campaign. Now they're trying to graft that idea -- make the right choice -- onto the old idea of make your own choice," Coulson says. "I don't think it works. It's dishonest."

He says more light dawned when the Alabama school litigants asked him last summer to review the home economics and psychology textbooks being questioned in the "secular humanism" case, most of which are also approved for use in California. Coulson found little fault with the psychology texts, but the home economics books astounded him. Alongside such traditional topics as nutrition, interior decorating, and sewing, Coulson found "significant portions" of the home economics books devoted to such doctrines of the human-potentials movement as the belief that individuals should eschew reliance on traditional authority and instead make autonomous decisions that reflect their own subjective values.

"One sees [the] emphases of Rogers -- on nonjudgmentalism, on independence from origins, and on turning inward -- reflected throughout," Coulson wrote in his testimony in the case. "Examples are: 'Each person is free to choose his or her lifestyle. ... You are responsible for your own life.' 'You must decide for yourself which role to adopt.' 'A major influence [on you] has been the attitudes and behaviors of each of your parents. ... You have probably learned some fairly traditional ideas. ... Many people believe that these traditional attitudes hinder growth and development of a person because they limit possibilities.' 'Only you can judge your values.'"

Traditionally religious parents had cause to be offended by the books for several reasons, Coulson argued. Just as the history books attacked by the fundamentalists avoided any

reference even to crucial religious events and motivations (such as the fact that many American settlers were fleeing religious persecution), Coulson found that the home economics textbook writers frequently appeared to make the assumption that God does not exist. In one book's discussion of death, for example, "the writer concludes by defining the very purpose of the funeral ceremony, and in so doing, excludes most of the world's people, for whom the funeral is a religious event deeply charged with meaning. She writes simply, 'The funeral is for those left behind.'"

But even more disturbing to Coulson than these sins of omission were the many instances in which textbook writers flatly contradicted religious teachings. "The readers of *Today's Teen* are told that 'it is important to care for yourself. You are the most important person in your life.'" But, Coulson asked, "What of the child who holds -- and is held by -- a more traditional belief: that



God is the be-all and end-all of life? ... What is such a child to make of that authorial voice which tells him it isn't so?" Another author asserts that "values are personal and subjective." In his testimony, Coulson wrote, "This is to settle by fiat a very complex and controversial question." Yet another passage, quoting Abraham Maslow (the psychologist who along with Rogers is credited with founding humanistic psychology), tells the student, "You are constantly creating yourself." Yet that claim, Coulson retorted, "is a mortal offense to every major religious form, except the Godless. To establish it as the lens through which students of home economics ... are instructed to view the world is to choose one religion to the detriment of all others. The traditional religious person will react to the claim 'you are constantly creating yourself' as blasphemy."

On March 4 of this year, Alabama federal court Judge W. Brevard Hand decided after hearing such arguments that some forty-odd books should be banned from Alabama classrooms because they were unconstitutionally preaching a secular humanist religion. (The judge said the "most important belief of this religion is its denial of the transcendent and/or supernatural; there is no God, no creator, no divinity.") The case is now being appealed, and the U.S. Supreme Court will make the final decision. Coulson says he wouldn't want that responsibility. Despite his testimony, Coulson doesn't believe that the mere act of purging secular humanism from the nation's textbooks will reverse the trends that so deeply disturb him.

Carl Rogers's influence has gone far beyond mere home economics textbooks, Coulson noted in his written court testimony. "For example, a 1982 study published in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* found that [Rogers] was cited in the counseling literature more often than any other author -- including Freud -- whose works have 'stood the test of time.' A survey of 800 randomly selected members of the divisions of counseling psychology and clinical psychology within the American Psychological Association in 1982 named Rogers 'the most influential psychotherapist' by far." Millions of parents who've never stepped inside a home economics classroom have been influenced by the Rogerian-inspired "parent effectiveness training" method and genuinely believe

they have no right to impose their value judgments on their offspring. Traditional academic standards have crumbled nationwide, and as a result, "This is the first generation that will not exceed, will not equal, will not even approach its parents in academic attainment," Coulson cries. "For the first time, we've gotten educationally into a state of devolution. We're in big trouble! And why are we in big trouble? I think I'm partly responsible."

Though Coulson has publicly retracted his own errors for years now, he says up until Rogers's recent death, he still felt inhibited from criticizing his former mentor. The two men always remained friendly. They talked fairly regularly by phone until Rogers's death. "I would call him," Coulson says. "I'd be writing something or other and would want to check certain facts with him." Though Rogers knew perfectly well just how drastically Coulson disagreed with him, the two men didn't argue ideas, and La Jolla minister and counselor Doug Land, also once a member of CSP's innermost circle, offers this explanation for why. "Carl of course was a genius, but Bill was a lot smarter than Carl in a lot of ways. Carl was no scholar. He was not widely read and was not the Thomistic casuist that Bill could be. I mean, Bill just will not lose an argument." Equally tough-minded, Rogers also couldn't tolerate losing an argument, according to Land, so "he would just stop arguing."

## Coulson says he at last feels free to discuss explicitly the mistakes he believes Rogers made...

But Rogers never suggested that Coulson should stay silent. Coulson says Rogers, in fact, did the opposite. When Coulson's 1977 article in *San Diego* magazine appeared, Rogers's only reaction was to question why Coulson had settled for airing his views in that publication, rather than some national journal. Though the article was critical, "he wanted to see it get out," Coulson recalls.

Coulson and his wife were up at their ranch when Rogers died, but they made the long drive down for the memorial service held in the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art's Sherwood Auditorium. There seven or eight people eulogized Rogers; Farson, for example, discussed how extremely tough-minded Rogers was, despite his mild-mannered demeanor. State Assemblyman John Vasconcellos credited Rogers with having been a great inspiration for the state-funded self-esteem task force, which Vasconcellos sponsored. Psychologist Maria Villas-Boas Bowen talked about how paradoxical Rogers was. Able to concentrate on and be absorbed by what he was doing at any given moment, Rogers could make friends wish he would pay more attention to their thoughts and lives. "The qualities which I admired most in him were also the ones which made a close continuing relationship with him so difficult," she said. But Rogers "was a man of integrity, true to himself, and a man in whom there was no deceitfulness or intent to harm anyone," she concluded.

That's partly why he never could feel hostile toward Rogers, Coulson says, but there are other reasons too. "Carl was genuinely likable. We owe a lot to him." Beyond that, Coulson says to disown Rogers would be to disown a part of himself. "I could no more deny Carl's importance to my life than I could deny my parents' importance in my life."

Now that he doesn't have to worry about hurting Rogers, Coulson says he at last feels free to discuss explicitly the mistakes he believes

Rogers made and to speculate on how the great man could have made them. In 1976 an interview with Rogers was aired on public television, and Coulson says in that film, Rogers made some telling revelations. He wasn't particularly anxious for position or honors, but "I want to have impact," Rogers stated bluntly. Coulson thinks that craving for influence over many people's lives led Rogers to extend his theory excessively. "Freud did the same thing," Coulson says. "Everything could be explained, everything. If you disagreed with the theory, you provided proof of the theory; you were practicing 'resistance'. ... Most therapists who are as eager for impact as we were tend to overgeneralize what they're doing." The psychotherapeutic theories become modern-day religious systems, Coulson contends, with the believers unable to see the harmful extensions of their doctrines.

At the same time, Coulson says, Rogers himself ironically never embodied his own doctrines. "Carl was not Mr. Nondirective in his own life. He wanted impact! He wanted influence. I mean, we were sitting around talking about feelings, and Carl was at home, writing another book." Coulson says he and others sometimes pointed this out, and asked, "Carl, why don't you write about discipline? Really, we're misleading people, putting so much emphasis on spontaneity." But Coulson says Rogers replied, "I can't. Discipline to me is like water to a fish. It's my element. I can't see it."

"He couldn't see it so he couldn't write about it," Coulson explains. "He could only see what he wanted to be, and what he wanted to be was more authentic. But see -- Carl had a good upbringing." Raised in a staunchly Protestant, Midwestern family, Rogers grew up with parents who loudly and clearly communicated the virtues of hard work and self-restraint; as a youth, he was the most dutiful of sons. Coulson still shakes his head at the fact that Rogers then went out and devised a system that was the exact opposite of his upbringing. "I used to say, 'Carl, we should all be so lucky as to have an upbringing like yours.' The man could not but be responsible. He talked about only doing what he wanted to do, but he had very strange wants. Like, he always wanted to make people happy. He always wanted to be responsible. But today we have these kids in Detroit. They're learning in their schools, 'Above all, you have a responsibility to yourself. Feel good about yourself. Then you'll do good work.' It wasn't that way in Carl's upbringing. His parents said in effect, 'Do good work, then feel good about yourself.' So he always did good work. It's not a system that can be applied to people who aren't well brought up. What we helped achieve was an educational system which brought kids down, rather than up. Because it withheld direction from them."

"Carl Rogers is my hero," Coulson says, in the present tense, unblinking. He says he means that "in the sense that Carl Rogers was always the son of his father and mother. He never stopped being their son in that he didn't have a choice not to do his work. It was built into him to do certain things." Coulson says that Rogers taught him that if one wanted to make an impact on the world, "then you better go out and do it. So that's what I'm trying to do. And I think now that he's gone it's easier for me, for some reason. Before, I always would double- and triple-check myself to see if I had some kind of Freudian motive going on, where the son wants to kill the father to win the affections of the mother. Was I just trying to kill my father? Well, I really believe now I'm just trying to make a better record for our group."

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