COMMENTS ON SANDRA WARNock’S "RATIONAL-EMOTIVE THERAPY AND THE CHRISTIAN CLIENT"

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ABSTRACTS: Comments on Warnock's article which shows that the philosophy and actions of Jesus demonstrate that he held some of the basic ideas of rational-emotive therapy and that pointing this out to Christian clients may be of help to them.

Sandra Warnock has written an excellent article, showing how many of the main ideas of RET overlap with some Christian philosophies, and particularly with some of the ideas and actions of Jesus. I quite agree with her that some religious concepts can be used to help clients, especially when these clients come to therapy with a pronounced theological view.

The use of Christian ideas in RET is not exactly new. Paul Hauck (1972) used them in Reason in Pastoral Counseling, John Powell (1976) did so in Fully Human, Fully Alive, and Howard Young (1977) used them in his paper, "Practicing RET With Bible Belt Christians," which he presented at the Second National Conference on Rational-Emotive Therapy in Chicago.

Hauck (1972, p. 228) noted that "it is ironic that Albert Ellis, who holds such unorthodox views on religion and sex, should be the one to offer us a system that touches at numerous points the heart of Christian doctrine." True. But it is also ironic that the Christian doctrine (like the philosophy of many other religions) is so contradictory that it includes unconditional forgiveness, or grace, as well as unconditional damnation and hell.

RET not only endorses much of the philosophy of Jesus, as Warnock shows, but I actually derived some of its basic tenets, especially that of
unconditional self-acceptance, from a famous Christian theologian, Paul Tillich (1953), who may also have influenced Carl Rogers.

How is it that I, an atheist and a skeptic about the historical existence of Jesus, have included in RET so much "Christian" philosophy? Very easily. I derived RET from many conflicting sources, including the views of Gautama Buddha (an ascetic), Epicurus (a hedonist), Epictetus (a pagan stoic), Marcus Aurelius (a persecutor of Christians), Baruch Spinoza (a pantheist), Bertrand Russell (an atheist), and many other thinkers. Christianity, for all its emphasis on damnation, has some excellent practical philosophies (as also have Judaism and many other religions). So RET has pragmatically adopted and adapted humanistic views from a variety of sources.

Does RET oppose people's being religious? No, it doesn't. Although I have pointed out some of the evils of dogmatic religion, I have also clearly distinguished between people's holding a preference for religious views and practices and their dogmatically, rigidly, and mustubrationally holding both religious and secular beliefs (Ellis, 1983, 1986; Ellis & Yeager, 1989). I distinguish religion from religiosity and define the latter as a dogmatic, cultish, monolithic belief in almost anything and as a one-sided, hostile opposition to all people who refuse to accept that belief. Thus, if I piously and rigidly believe in RET, I am afflicted with religiosity!

I therefore believe that secular religiosity (e.g., a devout belief that my political or economic system is completely better than your system and that I must at all costs prevent you from following your system) is just as dogmatic, fascistic, and terroristic as theological religiosity (a devout belief that my theological views are completely better than your theological views and that I must at all costs prevent you from following your views). Both these forms of bigotry are, I hold, harmful and both contribute to (and in some ways constitute) emotional disturbance (Ellis, 1986; Ellis & Yeager, 1989).

Nondogmatic and nonabsolutist religious views—like the ones Warnock points out that Jesus held—are not opposed to or opposed by RET; and, as she notes, can be usefully applied to help many clients. Ethical and practical rules of various religious and nonreligious groups frequently agree; as shown, for example, by the agreements of many religious and secular humanists. Although I personally have little use for Christian (and nonChristian) theology, I am happy to note, and often remind my clients, that Jesus gave unconditional grace and forgiveness to all humans, in spite of their sometimes execrable thoughts and acts. So does RET give this kind of grace!