

Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning

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Eugene T. Gendlin, Ph.D.

Philosophy has currently moved almost to the edge where this philosophy begins. The project on which it embarks is still not widely recognized, but with the current "postmodern" debates, most philosophy and most disciplines are on the brink of it.

The project is to **enter into** how concepts (logical forms, distinctions, rules, algorithms, computers, categories, patterns) relate to experiencing (situations, events, therapy, metaphoric language, practice, human intricacy). Or, we can phrase it: **how experiencing (.....) functions in our cognitive and social activities.**

Of course one cannot stand outside this relation in order to conduct such an examination. The relations to be examined will obtain in the very process of examining. Experiencing will play some of its roles in the process of speaking about -- and with -- them. This philosophy is therefore constantly reflexive. It can say what it says only as what it talks about also functions in the very saying. And since it tells how the experiential side always exceeds the concepts, this also happens in the concepts right here. The **"functional relationships"** and **"characteristics"** set forth in this book are themselves specific ways in which their own formulation can be exceeded. The curiosity about how this might be possible is an appetite I would like to rouse in my reader.

Once we can employ the roles of experiencing (.....) to **think with and about** these very roles, we can think with them about anything else as well. The project requires and makes possible **a thinking that employs more than conceptual logic, rules, or distinctions. We become able to think with the intricacy of situations (experience, practice,....)**

But don't we always employ this already? Logical inferences are never pure. There is always a situation, an implicit experiential context that is more than any formed form. What can we add to this? Nothing less than a whole new power of human thinking. If we enter into how this more functions, we become able to employ it deliberately, and find that many ways of thought open from it, which otherwise did not exist.

But experiencing and concepts (or symbols) are surely not two separated things that have to become "related." Each is always already implicit in the other. There is no "unsymbolized experiencing" anymore than there is "pure logic". Even without explicit words or concepts, experiencing is "symbolized" at least by the interactions and situations in which experiencing happens. But if there is always only both, how can we attribute a role to experiencing rather than to the inseparable symbolization? If every moment is both, it has seemed impossible to know what is done by the one rather than the other. But there is a way to discern their different roles -- **in the transitions** from one statement or action to another.

The move from one step of thought or speech to the next may come by a conceptual inference. Or there may simply be an interruption, a change to something else. One might report

events, telling what happened next. We are also culturally habituated to act in certain situations by saying certain common phrases which lead smoothly to other common phrases.

But the next step may also arise through an experiential connection. How we experience the situation may lead us to a next step which makes sense, but could not follow in any of the other ways. This often happens without special notice, but sometimes we pause to refer directly to experiencing. Direct reference is itself a change, and then leads to a further move. There are different kinds of experiential moves. Each exceeds the form that existed at the previous step.

Obviously there is no final formulation of the ways in which moves from experiencing can exceed a formulation. We could distinguish more kinds of further moves, or use other respects to distinguish kinds. Our new "basis" is not any one list, but the wider experiential-interactive functioning. Throughout the book I show how we might formulate differently. We can juxtapose other models and approaches with different results, yet we still stand in the ongoing experiencing.

The conceptual variety would be mere relativism, if there were nothing else. But when we enter and employ experiencing, even a few distinctions among kinds of moves will open exciting avenues, a whole new arena. When distinctions and concepts are "relative to" experiencing, it turns out that they need not be ultimate.

Since our project is unavoidable, even a poor first attempt can help, and I think this is a good one. This cannot long remain only one, so the reader can be ready to improve on what is done here.

The kind of transition I call "direct reference" is itself a kind of symbolizing. It lifts out (creates, finds, synthesizes, differentiates) a "this," which was not a this before. When we seem to find what "was" there, we have actually moved further. We do not need a false equation. No equation is possible between implicit and explicit. What matters is the way in which the next step **follows from** (continues, carries forward, makes sense from) what preceded it.

One result is to enable us to enter the implicit context of scientific logic. We must not merely denigrate logic. It has developed enormous sophistication in our time. It has brought the wonderful technology that enables many more people to live, and live better than before. But now it is computerizing our decisions and redesigning the animals with careless genetic engineering "for the market." It threatens to redesign our bodies as well. As we become able to think in the implicit experiential context of science, we can develop ways to bring more than the market to bear on scientific and social policies.

On the other side there has been a great development also in human experiencing, with therapeutic and interpersonal processes. Where people used to be silent, now they have a developed vocabulary with which to explore and express their experiential and relational intricacies. The old community in which people related mostly in roles has broken down, and new kinds of community are only just beginning to develop, in which we can relate from our intricacy, from coming freshly into language (for example, "focusing partnerships," "Changes groups," and many kinds of support groups). How to think with all this is an exciting and still very open question.

Both developments require examining the relation between experiencing and concepts. That is the project which this book opens.

Today most philosophers find only discouragement in the recognition that all statements and logical inferences are conditioned by someone's situation, by the biases of culture and social class, usually summed up as "history and language." Wittgenstein, Dilthey, and Heidegger have powerfully shown that our subjective experiences are not just inner reactions; they are our interactions in life and situations. They are immediate interactional meanings. This brings a vast change. It eliminates the old model of the five senses and interpretation.

Wittgenstein has convincingly shown that the sense we make with language is not controlled by concepts, logical forms, distinctions, rules, or generalizations. But if universal and "objective" concepts are not possible, it can seem as if there is nothing for philosophy to do.

There is no pure logic, no neutral conceptual inference alone, but the import of this has been misunderstood. It is true that conclusions do not follow just from clean rational progressions, objectively and neutrally by logic **alone**. Not only are there all sorts of "biases," but nothing can be fitted into logic without first being cut into the little unit factors which can fit into logical slots. And, if one slightly changes even one such unit, the logical inferences are utterly undone. The use of logic is always enmeshed in the wider context from which units must first be made. Adding one more little bit from there can lead the cleanest logic into contradictions. So it is not mysterious why logic and conceptual inference can always be disorganized and ruptured. Logical arguments now seem useless in philosophy. It has been understood that everything depends on what one fills into the logic, and this cannot be decided by logic.

This recognition leads many philosophers into an error: Because logical conceptual inference is never pure, these philosophers deny and ignore **the evident power of what is (wrongly called) "pure" logical inference,** but we can come to understand what sort of a process "pure" logical inference really is, and why it has its great power. We can enter and examine the implicit experiential functions involved in pursuing the logical implications **as if alone**. At other times, perhaps moments later, we also need to explicate the implicit context, rather than holding it as-if apart. Very different implicit experiential roles make that possible as well. Logic and experiencing are both involved both times, but in quite different ways.

How can one dismiss logic, just when it is changing everything around us?

But in the current debates, only one group seems to appreciate the powers of logic, while the other is alone in knowing the limits. These two groups hardly speak to each other. **We can hope to develop a society-wide understanding of the power of logical deduction, as well as ways in which we can employ the wider process of human sense-making. They have distinguishable powers.** We need to become able to think how they function in each other.

Rather than being mired in one hopeless mix of broken concepts and biasing experiences, we can open a new arena: We can enter and speak with (and thereby about) some of the roles played by ongoing experiencing.

From where does this philosophy stem? It moves on from Dilthey, Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty (and indirectly Heidegger¹), also McKeon, Peirce and Dewey, as well as Plato, Aristotle,

Leibnitz, Kant and Hegel. My recognition of certain difficulties is very European, but my emphasis on situations, practice, action, feedback, transitions and progressions is very North American.

A New Philosophy can begin with the recognition that we can assume neither that the world (.....) is ordered as a logical or conceptual system, nor that it is arbitrary as if "anything goes." There was always a conflicting variety of "ultimate" definitions of truth and goodness. The great error today is to assume that something is lost by this recognition. Instead, we discover that we can think with the greater precision and intricacy that is characteristic of situation, experience, practice, action This is **more orderly and precise** than the pretended, overarching definitions.

Rather than a second-choice or compromise, **it becomes our preference to speak and think with the way words can exceed their conceptual structure** even while employing that structure. In use they always elicit effects that are more precise and demanding than could follow just from the structure.

There are ways to employ this experienced "excess" deliberately in a stronger and more critical thinking. We can read and think a "....." after every assertion. We need not lose the conceptual implications if we also think with the In this way we always have **more than logic** in play, not less.

We are introducing a great change in the relation between concepts and experience (situations). We are changing the notions of perception, interpretation, and mediation. We deny not only the ultimate validity of any set of general, cultural, historical, conceptual, or linguistic assumptions. We also deny the postmodern assumption that all order, meaning, and rationality in situations is totally derivative from historical determinants. It is true that we are never without them, but life and situations always make much more intricate sense than could follow just from the historical determinants. They do not function like logical premises, as if all further happenings will be subsumed under them. They are not "the" conditions that make experience possible. History and culture only elaborate an animal body that lives interactionally directly in situations, and continues to perform vital and noticeable functions in speech and thought.

Applying any concept elicits an experiential feedback. We can let our next step of thought come from this experiential feedback, rather than only from the concept. We can think with both conceptual and experiential steps, a "zig-zag" which employs both powers. It can make new sense, and lead us to modify our concepts, rather than being confined in them, or ending in mere contradictions. Experiential thinking moves beyond postmodern "rupture" and contradiction.

The Introduction and Chapter 1 lead to the project: of examining the roles which experiential meaning plays in cognition. This is only a modest statement of the problem as is proper before embarking. A number of strands both in philosophy and in the social sciences lead to this problem and project.

Chapter 2 show that experiential meaning plays vital roles in cognition.

Chapter 3 presents some "functional relationships" between experiencing and cognition, especially "metaphor," "comprehension" (when one speaks from what is now called a "felt sense."), "relevance," and "circumlocution."

The "theory" of metaphor (really the relationship of the logical and experiential functions in metaphor) is currently still working its way through the climate of thought and research. The metaphoric **creation** of new likenesses, the so-called "emergent qualities" has been recognized, but it is not yet understood that every word has a newly precise emergent meaning in its situation².

Is it creation? Might it not be a synthesizing, a differentiating, a making, or a finding? We know that no one of these conflicting cognitive systems has priority over the others, and they do not have priority over the way the metaphoric process functions -- to give an immediate result which we only later explain by interpolating similarities and differences. (See my "Crossing and Dipping" and "What Happens When Wittgenstein Asks AWhat Happens When ...?")

Chapter 4A presents **the reversal of the usual philosophical order.** Rather than giving some cognitive system priority and reading it into experience, our philosophy recognizes the priority of making experiential sense (as in metaphors or in speaking from a felt sense). Once that has occurred, we can explain it by interpolating cognitive units in retrospect, (but this is a further experiential process which brings new further implications).

The reversal makes a new and more radical empiricism possible. The current rejection of empiricism in favor of the view that we "construct" nature stems from the recognition that different hypotheses bring different findings. This creates the illusion that empirical findings depend just on the hypotheses (and on the biases, political pressures, and choices among questions and approaches). The desire for a single map or system must be given up (why would we want nature to be so poor?), but not truth. Our scientific assertions change all the time, but what this book calls "metaphor" and "comprehension" leads to a kind of truth that does not require statements to remain the same.

Empirical findings do not depend just on the choice of the hypotheses. Experiencing (event, nature, practice, situation) does respond differently to different hypotheses, procedures, and ways of unitizing, but always with more intricacy than could have been derived from what we had in our approach to it. Contrary to the current view, nature is not arbitrary or invented. It is more orderly than a cognitive system. It is a "**responsive order**" which gives various, but always more exact results than could have been constructed or deduced. It leads to an empiricism that is not naive.

Chapter 4B lays out ten "Characteristics" which have been called "a logic of experiencing" (of some of its roles in cognition). The characteristics show how differently experiencing and logic function together, compared to logic "alone." Here are some examples:

Experiencing is "non-numerical" and "multischematic" but never just anything you please. On the contrary, it is a more precise order not limited to one set of patterns and units.

When we think with experiencing as well as logic, a sub-sub-detail can come to redetermine the widest categories. A theory may lead to an experiential detail, but from the detail much can follow which cannot follow from the theory.

Between two things many new experiences can be created. Therefore any concept or relationship can be applied (found, created) between any two things. (But even wild playful metaphors have to make sense where they occur.)

Unlike the usual model of limited degrees of freedom, **the more** requirements one imposes, **the more** new possibilities are opened. When any two meanings ***cross*** experientially, the result is not their lowest common denominator but new experiences which could not have followed logically from either. In retrospect we commonly but wrongly say that they "were" implicit, but the relation which does obtain can be characterized and employed.

Chapter 5 moves in line with these characteristics. It shows that one can go on from any point not only from what is being said, but also from the process of saying it. The chapter is self-instancing. It moves many times from the process-side of what it says.

The chapter also shows **the IOFI principle**, ("instance of itself"). Any human meaning is always "such" a meaning, but not in one category or under one universal. Rather, from any (so-called) "particular" supposedly subsumed under a category we can generate countless new universals. These are ways in which any "**this**" experiencing is **an instance of such** experiencing. Each universal (each respect in which we say it is "such") can be taken as an experiential "particular" from which new universals can be generated. Thinking is much more powerful when it can move along IOFI lines.

Chapter 6 shows how one can take all texts and propositions experientially even if they were not so intended, and how one can think on from any text or proposition both experientially and logically.

Chapter 7 shifts the usual representational puzzle in the social sciences to a new approach in terms of different **manners of process**. It is shown how the content of experience is generated by the process of experiencing. The kind of content one will find depends upon what manner of process is happening.

The process variables for research proposed here have led to the Experiencing Scale and a continuing sequence of research studies³, as well as the "focusing" procedure used in many fields to teach the process of referring directly to one's (at first unclear) bodily sense of any concern, project, or juncture of a discussion⁴. The kind of thinking that was developed in this book has had applications in various fields including physics⁵, and in the teaching of writing⁶. There have been many developments.

A professor of architecture in Austria says: "The style today is called 'individual,' because each architect takes little bits from old buildings and puts them together in a new arrangement. But I teach the students to use focusing. With focusing I take a building I love, for instance my grandmother's old house in the mountains, and I let the felt sense of it come to me. {This is the felt meaning, the bodily 'comprehension,' the} **From the felt sense** I design a whole new modern building which uses nothing that looks like my grandmother's house."

Neither in life nor in philosophy are we limited to rearranging the existing, already-formed things and concepts. We can engage the experiential meanings. We can deliberately employ and expand the vital roles which they perform⁷.

Philosophy can reopen the old assumptions and conceptual models if we think with our more intricate experiencing as well as with logic. We can think everything more truly if we think it philosophically, that is with attention to how we think it, and with the critical understanding that no concept, rule, or distinction ever equals experiencing, -- but may carry it forward. Our more intricate experiencing is not thereby replaced. It is always still there and open to being carried forward in new ways, but never arbitrarily, always only in quite special and precise ways.

¹ For my relation to Heidegger, see my "Phenomenology as non-logical steps" In E. F. Kaelin & C.O. Schrag (Eds.), *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. XXVI. *American phenomenology. Origins and developments*, (pp. 404-410). Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989 and my "Analysis," In Heidegger, M. *What Is a Thing?* (Chicago: Regnery. 1968). Also "Befindlichkeit": Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, 16 (1-3), 43-71, 1978/79 and

"Dwelling," In Silverman H., Mickunas A., Kissel T., and Lingis A. (eds.), *The Horizons of Continental Philosophy*: (Dordrecht, Kluwer. 1988), pp. 149-150.

² See my Reply to Mark Johnson In Levin, D.M., ed., *Language Beyond Postmodernism: Saying, Thinking, and Experiencing In Gendlin's Philosophy*. Northwestern U. Press, 1997. See also Schneider, H.J. *Die Leibbezogenheit des Sprechens: Zu den Ansätzen von Mark Johnson and Eugene T. Gendlin, Synthesis Philosophica*, Zagreb, 1995.

³ "What Comes After Traditional Psychotherapy Research?" *Am. Psychologist*, 41 2, 1986, 131-136. See also: *Focusing Folio* Research Issue, 16, 1-2, 1997.

⁴ *Focusing* (Second edition) New York: Bantam Books, 1981. (Translations:

Danish, Dutch, French, German:, Hungarian, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish:, Swedish.) and *Focusing Partnerships*. New York: Focusing Publications, Focusing Institute, 1996. See also:

Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy , N.Y.:Guilford, 1996. especially chapter 21 on values and experiential differentiation, and "A Philosophical critique of the concept of narcissism," In: Levin, D. (Ed.), *Pathologies of The Modern Self*, 251-304. N.Y. University Press, 1987. In German, see *Körperbezogenes Philosophieren*.140 pps.Focusing Bibliothek DAF 5,Würzburg: 1994.

⁵ See Gendlin, E. T. and Lemke, J., "A Critique of Relativity and Localization," *Mathematical Modeling*, vol. 4, 1983, pp. 61-72.

⁶ See Elbow, P. and Belanoff, P. *A Community of Writers*, New York: Random House, 1989, and, Perl, S., *A Writer's Way of Knowing: Guidelines for Composing*. In *Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive*. Brand, A. and Graves, R. (eds.), Portsmouth: Boynton-Cook Press, 1994.

⁷ See "Process Ethics and the Political Question," In A-T. Tymieniecka (Ed.), *Analecta Husserliana. Vol. XX.*, Reidel. 1986; reprinted In *Focusing Folio*, 5 (2), 68-87. 1986.

Also see the following:

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"The Primacy of the Body, not the Primacy of Perception." *Man and World*, 25 (3-4), 1992.

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