

THE NATURE OF OUR EXCEEDING

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It is in our nature to always freshly become, to exceed our forms such that we are 'fresh beings' that always already are elaborating the universe endlessly.

When I was a young boy, I played frequently in my grandmother's kitchen garden. Her farm was like an exotic foreign land to me, filled with rolling hills, animals in pens, and a huge red barn. Oh, and it was dusty in the summers, very dusty. I played for hours outside or in the barn before being called in by my grandmother for a late afternoon snack. A first generation immigrant from Poland, she would hoist me up on a worn wooden stool next to her butcher-block table, which sat in the middle of her kitchen.

After I was up on the stool, my grandmother would always ask in her heavily accented English, *What's doings Kevin?* 'Doings' was code for her inviting me to say whatever was on my mind. These were no deep philosophical or personal conversations. They were appropriate to my age and our circumstances. I wondered about the hay in the barn; how it got so high up in the lofts. I wondered about a lot of things. These brief conversations were a way for me to explore.

One time I recall her not asking me this. I missed being asked, *What's doings?* Instead, my grandmother increasingly had a far-off look in her eye, and sometimes I thought she'd forgotten who I was or that I was even there. As a boy, I could not know that my grandmother was going senile. My parents noticed something different, too. They eventually kept me away from her, something that brings a certain sadness in me even now as I write this: a sense of longing pulling from in the middle of my chest to finish a conversation.

I knew something had changed — in grandmother, between us, and in my family. It was never to be the same. Today I recognize that 'my relationship' with my grandmother was not only 'mine'. Our relationship was constituted through an intertwining of other relations; some familial, some cultural, some friendships present and past, and of course various forms of tissue process (genetics, cells, etc). I recognize that these various strands had *exceeded* their former form. The word *exceeding* implies and emphasizes the forward leaning direction I believe is inherent in all change, which is not to say that it is necessarily felt as a 'positive' thing.

In the early 1960's, my parents knew nothing of Focusing (Gendlin, 1968) or of Gendlin's philosophy. Of course, neither of these was as fully in the public domain at this time as they are today, nor were my parents the kinds of folks that would have sought out Gendlin's work. They didn't know that I needed to be asked, *What's doings?* — to be invited into continued *saying* (searching and expressing) with my grandmother. Of course, I did not know how to ask either. My parents saw their job as protecting me, and that they did. Now I see that my relationship with my grandmother (with all the strands intertwining) continued

inside me as a stalled life process for many years. It lingered beyond what it would have been *if* the pattern of that relating had been exposed to a *life-forwarding* pattern.

At the time though, I was not yet exposed to such ways of thinking, nor was I capable of these. Through this experience and others, I put together that it must not be right to say what was going on for me when there were no words yet to describe it. I eventually stopped saying what was doing. More so, this now-transfigured form of our relating withheld its original fresh invitation that had characterized it. I had temporarily lost this bit of fresh living in my life where risk-taking and discovery formed my deep appreciation for the changeable.

No surprise then, when it came to larger, emerging life processes, ones no one in my family would or could dare talk about in the open, I could not find my voice. An era of saying what was doing was gone in a certain way. However, that aliveness pattern, which I will call a *saying kind of relating*, did not wither completely. It took many years of experience and a great deal of education and opportunity to open this living pattern again.

Eventually, through reflection on these experiences and others, my education, and especially my exposure to and use of Focusing and ‘Thinking at the Edge’ (Gendlin, 2004a), this current project took shape. The project I’m referring to further refines how we human beings exceed the forms of our living while retaining our sense of continuity. I’m calling this entire thing the *nature of exceeding*. I am particularly interested in the nature of exceeding as it can relate to psychopathology and psychotherapy, although as will be made clearer, this growing theory can be applied to other domains of human living as well.

A BIT ABOUT MY METHOD

I want to very briefly make a note at this point about the overall method of inquiry underlying this article. I am employing what has been called a 1st Person Science approach to discovery (Shear, and Varela, 1999 and Gendlin and Johnson, 2004b). The hallmark of this approach is its emphasis on implicit meaning. Implicit meaning (meaning that is *carried forward* from our *bodily felt sensing*) is more important than explicit (explicated) meaning, although both are key. Implicit meaning carries a much richer sense of the whole than explicit meaning can (Walkerden, 2004).

For Gendlin, *meaning* is a term used specifically, i.e. with specific meaning. For Gendlin, meaning is derived from the vast intricacies of human experiencing, but is not fixed in character. It retains ongoingness, which can be felt by us and used as a new entity that we can follow. This makes ‘felt-meaning’ scientifically useful. In other words, *meaning*, once we call it out from the vastness of *experiencing*, such that it retains its rich, felt, and ongoing intricacy, can become the object of any inquiry. In my developing theory on the nature of change, the meanings called out from the vast experiencing of change are now the focus of my inquiry.

Clark Moustakas (1990) developed a 1st Person Scientific approach he calls ‘heuristic phenomenology.’ In writing this article, I utilized Moustakas’ heuristics along with Focusing and ‘Thinking at the Edge’ or TAE (Gendlin, 2004a), to define and further elaborate

my theory. The heuristic research method uses *experiencing* as the fundamental basis of research that desires to say something meaningful from that experiencing. Moustakas specifically employs Focusing in this method to further refine the concepts, aid in analysis, and give pause during the research process as it is unfolding. Of the role of Focusing in heuristic research, Douglas and Moustakas (1985) say, “the focusing (sic) process enables the researcher to identify qualities of an experience that have remained out of conscious reach primarily because the individual has not paused long enough to examine his or her experience of the phenomenon” (p. 25).

Qualitative research approaches like Moustakas’ heuristic method have high internal validity as well as a measure of external validity. Validity in qualitative research is about whether the project as a whole and in its specifics actually captures the experience under investigation. Validity is not best expressed as a measurement — as is the case in traditional scientific approaches — i.e. through establishing correlations or through statistical computation. Rather, validity (internal and external) in qualitative research is an issue of meaning.

The researcher is responsible for conducting the project, analyzing the data, and presenting the findings in a manner that is both rigorous and accurate. Validity is found first internally, as it is felt within the experiencing of the researcher and the subjects, who are referred to as co-researchers. In other words, a finding has validity when it is *felt* to accurately represent the *object of the inquiry*; when the meaning(s) of the experiencing under investigation is presented clearly to the participants and the reader of the report and they resonate to it. Key questions qualitative researchers put to themselves are ‘Do I find myself here?’ and ‘Have my explications of a certain experience/experiencing fairly and descriptively captured the experience or experiencing?’

Second, many qualitative researchers contend that external validity (i.e. generalizability vis-à-vis causal inferences) is an inadequate concept for understanding human experiencing. Some suggest, and I agree, that a new term be used instead: *transferability*. Transferability refers to the ability of our results to be found to be meaningful in like situations. Transferability in qualitative research is found when we personally sense meaning in the data presented. This implies thoroughness and appropriate use of procedures. If, as a reader, you can find yourself there in my report, then you have, in this sense, validated the findings.

One key demonstration of transferability is found in the written report itself. No doubt writing is a powerful tool in this form of research as it needs to carry the felt understandings forward in the writing itself. If the findings resonate for the reader (who is not a co-researcher), internal validity and transferability are achieved. In my view, higher internal validity and transferability come with methods that specifically highlight the implicit felt sense.

Findings in qualitative research are generally presented as themes of specific experiencing under investigation. In this case, I am looking at the nature of human change such that it is possible we retain our sense of ongoingness. Having a method like Moustakas’ is important if we want to say something from experiencing that is not going to be seen as just ‘about me.’ I won’t go more into the specific uses of or background of TAE here. There is

an entire *Folio* edition (2004a) referenced above if the reader would like more on this valuable tool.

I also want to note here that I am drawing upon the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to help me elaborate upon this evolving theory of the nature of exceeding. Levinas' philosophy emphasizes ethics as the fundamental field in which human beings become human. For Levinas, ethics is *the* form of interhuman relating from which all other considerations and abstractions flow.

Levinas says, "I respond before I am" (Silberstein, 1962). I come into being because we are already in relation. Kunz (2008) sums up Levinas' philosophy as pointing to:

The concrete presence of the neighbor commanding, 'do not do violence, help me,' as more fundamental than any thinking about ethical responsibility. The prohibition of harm comes first not from religious or social dictates but from the goodness of the other for the good of the other. His philosophy is as simple as that. The application of this first principle, which is not a principle but persons, commands our renewed attention to many social, psychological, political, legal, economic, educational problems (Kunz, personal communication, 2008).

For Levinas, and Kunz, *persons* are not already separated entities. We come into being as interactions first and are thus the foundation of his philosophy and any principles or actions we might make.

Elsewhere in his ethical philosophy, Levinas distinguishes the *saying* from the *said*. *Saying* is a form of expression that is alive, incomplete, engaging, engaged, and searching. *Saying* holds manifestation by virtue of it retaining the *feel* of our lived situation. Thus, the *saying-form* of any relationship, like that of my grandmother and me, is fresh, ongoing, and felt. The *said-form of relating* is a result of our signification of (or ascribing meaning to) manifestation. The *said-form* is distinguished by its demonstrating overt stabilization, or a deadening of the raw potential found in *saying*. Modern science and psychology, in general, over privilege stabilization. Retaining the fresh openness of the *saying* that moves each process forward is sometimes lost.

For Levinas, and I am certain for Gendlin, it is important to have a *feel* for the aliveness present in our living. Levinas sometimes referred to this *feel* as phenomena. He says, "Phenomena open to disturbance, a disturbance letting itself be brought back to order" (Levinas, 1996, p. 73). I have experienced in my life many instances that are of the *saying kind* that opens further through 'disturbances'. The saying-form of relating still holds within it freshness, discovery, perplexity, even awe. It is form(ed), but it has not been fixed in my consciousness as it might be were I to ascribe it particular, static meaning. In other words, when a feeling pattern is symbolized or assumed to have a fixed meaning, we will inevitably have to come to terms with its rigidity. The result of having to bear this rigidity is often experienced as psychic pain or guilt.

Saying kinds of relating hold exceeding within them. Temporary or possible or incomplete statements about how we relate to things gives us the freedom to go beyond **our historical relationship with them.**

FURTHER INSTANCES OF EXCEEDING

While I am using two central instances from my personal life to build a theory of exceeding, these are by no means the only instances I could have used. I have many, many instances of the nature of exceeding I can point to from my clinical practice, my life as an educator, and other theories already articulated. I take a calculated risk in presenting an emerging theory based upon what might seem merely personal stories. I feel the risk is worth it. Human beings living in their particular lives generate all known theory. Saying how it is a theorist comes to form an idea is uncommon, but I hope it becomes more the case in the future. As I continue further in what amounts to public theory making, I most certainly will feed my theory with the information found in other domains in the manner suggested in the final steps of TAE.

In the first instance, the case of my grandmother and me, I longed for the form of our relating: What's doings? Yes, I grieved over the disturbance of our usual pattern of being with each other, which had been exceeded by another form arising from within the formerly formed relating.

Another instance of a *saying kind of relating* emerged while I was in graduate school in Chicago in the mid-1980's. I had a course that gave me an experience, which led me to regain a sense of that bit of fresh living. The course was Client-Centered Theory and Practice, taught by Margaret Warner. I recall that class with great warmth and fondness. It introduced me to the simple, yet profound experience of being heard. It also introduced me to Focusing. Finding words to say what was as yet unknown or at the edges of my awareness, proved to be a catalyst for deep personal recognition and change.

Through Gendlin's Focusing process and later through *A Process Model* (Gendlin, 1997) and TAE, I began to see just how vital *exceeding* is to understanding who I was as a person. A significant piece of this understanding came by getting in my bones what it is like to be heard and to hear another human being. Experiencing listening and being heard were fundamental. During this time, I came across one of my favorite sayings. It comes from an ancient Taoist, Lao Tse whose words sum up my deep feelings this way:

It is as though he listened,

and such listening as his enfolds us in a silence

in which at last we begin to hear

what we are meant to be.

— Lao Tse, 4th century, BCE

While learning Focusing, how to listen, and experience being heard, I began a deep inward journey. Like so many of us, that first flush of excitement that comes when something really shifts in us, setting us a bit freer inside, was profound. I wanted more and was a bit

intimidated by it as well. Focusing enlivened and scared me. I could sense some possibility of deep, deep recognition coming and it was huge — life altering in fact.

Almost from the start, I felt Focusing was a pattern I could enter into, not a technique or even a skill per se but as a life process. I was taking plenty of technique and skill-oriented classes and this thing called Focusing was definitely not like those. With the dedication of great teachers like Reva Bernstein, Mary McGuire, and Doralee Grindler-Katona, I found myself in similar experience perhaps to that which Lao Tse refers. I was experiencing being heard for the very first time and in that I began to hear what I was meant to be, who I was. Who I am was changing.

These weeks and months of further exposure to Focusing and the tradition of listening from the Client-Centered perspective of Carl Rogers (1902-1987), helped me affirm something I had known for a long, long time and yet could not comfortably say aloud to myself, much less to many others: I am a gay man. While this was a freeing realization, I was enough of a natural skeptic to know that what I needed to find was my own way in this. I could not follow others' way of being — the cultural patterns and personal habits I saw in the gay community of Chicago. Certainly, I could not embrace being gay as another kind of limiting, totalization of identity. Rather, with the help of the Focusing process, my self-identity remained as something fresh and on-going without risking failure of a cohesive sense of self. Identity was not *signification* as Levinas would caution against; i.e. my nature remained fresh, negotiations of choices were entered as fresh processes, ones for which an outcome was never wholly known until it was there.

After I graduated, I came to Seattle University. I read more and more of Gendlin's works, eventually diving into *A Process Model* and TAE. I saw terms that I could feel inside as being 'right' and expressing my own kind of knowing and being. *Everything by everything, occurring into implying, focaling, direct referent, new universals*, these are just some of the terms coming from Gendlin's new philosophy of implicit entry that bring me excitement and even something like hope.

*I had a second birth when my soul and my body
loved one another and were married.*

— Khalil Gibran (1927/1998)

While this sentiment might seem overly romantic, it does capture something of the experiencing into which Focusing can open us. What was forming inside me was a sense of cohesion, of disparate aspects or parts of myself united even as I felt the former formed notions I had of myself exceeding themselves. Significations returned back to phenomena.

*The greatest discovery of my generation is that man can
alter his life simply by altering his attitude of mind.*

— William James (1842-1910)

While Gibran and James could not have anticipated our world 100 years hence, their words still have the power to evoke and open in us new considerations and new actions. Like their words, Gendlin's many essays powerfully remain potent precisely because they retain the fresh openness from which they arose. We find ourselves in them. It is frankly much to my surprise that I find myself in the philosophy of Gendlin, because 'I am no philosopher.' Thanks to Gendlin, we can now precisely say how the use of language gets beyond language and make our own models from our directly felt knowing.

In this regard, I have been working out my own model of how humans exceed, or evolve, change, or progress, and retain our sense of continuity. A person like me whose core identity shifts into a fresh cohesive sense of self can be human in the usual sense. How is this possible? This might sound an odd way to put something, but it's very close to Gendlin's question 'how is Focusing possible?'

In the instance of my 'coming-out,' I have a sense of myself as being the same guy before and after I 'came out.' While recognition of an aspect of my personhood certainly was a 'big deal' for a time, it did not monopolize my sense of being 'me'. In a similar way, my relating to my grandmother changed many times. It seems it would have changed once and for all at her death, but this is not so. I continued my being in relation with her beyond her death, through personal reflection, working out my theory, and writing this paper. The man who Kevin is now is no different from then — and yet is not the same either. The forms are exceeded without loss of cohesion.

SOME THEORY DEVELOPMENT ON THE NATURE OF EXCEEDING

Major elements of this project took shape during and immediately after attending a TAE workshop in upstate New York in the summer of 1998. I developed some sentences that say something of the kind of human it is who can also be found as 'me' (not just a formed me as in an individual) and who is also exceeding that form. I put it this way at the TAE retreat:

It is in my nature to freshly become, to be always in transition. This fresh being I am (becoming) is a cracking open of orders, bringing an always-uniting present existence that is itself a continuing.

I am that kind of human who is elaborated innate bodily order.

Each of these sentences can be elaborated and needs to be. Taken together they retain the fresh understanding that comes to me when I dip into 'who is a changing human such that I can be possible.' Let me elaborate a bit about the sentences.

Sentence 1: *It is in my nature to freshly become, to be always in transition.* I have said something already about the first sentence. I'll return to this one and all others at the end of this essay.

Sentence 2: *This fresh being that I am (becoming) is a cracking open of orders, bringing an always-uniting present existence that is itself a continuing.*

I have two central elaborations on this sentence: 1) Humans are perceivers of patterns — patterns that at first glance seem separate and unconnected — as well as being pattern makers and pattern changers, and 2) bodily order exists AND it is a kind of order that elaborates.

First, let me say more about patterns, pattern making, and pattern changing. Some mystics, yogis, saints, and yes, some scientist types (like psychologists, physicians, and physicists for instance) have perceived patterns beyond those explainable by current scientific means. The evidence for such patterns exists beyond what is directly observable, not in the external or purely intellectual, but the deepest internal places of our experience. From here we can sense and know much more than from our intellect alone.

If you've ever been in love, you know exactly what I mean. Can you really explain your feelings of love for another person? Of course not. But, you don't have to either, because it's one of those things that we all know about. To put this in Process Model vernacular, shared processes (like love) are understood in their crossing (sharing of some type) and dipping (felt sensing/Focusing). Gendlin (1995) says, "We can understand each other, across different experiences and different cultures, because by crossing we create in each other what neither of us was before" (p. 559).

For me, patterns can function as crossings do for Gendlin. They are not essentially fixed as permanent pre-existing commonalities or symbolizations, but are re-structured in their use. Of course, patterns of any kind can also function as their own whole. These two forms of patterning do not contradict. In my way of putting this, patterns (making them, recognizing them, and changing them) are forms that are exceeded in everyday use and in larger scale human evolutions; i.e. social change, peace building efforts, etc. They are form(ed) and yet are exceeded in and by their use.

In a paper on Rumi, Elizabeth Lease (1997) stated that Rumi — and I might add this is probably true of other mystics such as Thomas Merton, John of the Cross, or Theresa of Avila — believed that "all corporeal things are manifestations of God, thereby creating an inherent link between the form and the formless." Mystics and scientists agree that we see opposites via our sensory perception, but mystics go one-step further to insist that we see the manifested form of the infinite and unknowable attributes of God in patterns of perception itself. From a mystic's point of view there are two realms of the universe, the form and the formless, which should not be construed as distinct.

Lease says,

They are analogous to the front and back of a mirror with its backside acting as the earth and the front acting as the image of God, a continuum of sorts. Man, bounded by his physical manifestation, illustrated by his utilization of his five senses, sees only the forms of the universe; yet, Rumi always maintains that there persists a component of man which is capable of comprehending and appreciating the non-corporeal: the soul (Elizabeth Lease, 1997, retrieved December 12, 2007. Link inactive).

Dipping and crossing are felt experiences. These terms help us understand how patterns emerge, how they can be freshly entered, and how they are exceeded. In my example of

coming out, and in the account of my grandmother's descent into senility, I certainly felt the exceeding of the prior forms of relating. At times the ordering of the patterns of my identity or the character of my relating gave up its sentience with a bang. At times in both processes, I recall vividly a sense of being cracked open. This probably sounds frightening, even violent. I won't disagree.

I experienced a profound sense of lightness and opening as these orders (patterning) cracked in a way I felt precisely. We see this dual phenomenon of shifts and releasing frequently in Focusing and TAE. The shift in felt sense from 'all stopped up' to relief, for instance, is well documented in our work. The 'ah ha,' or sudden insight, comes sometimes and sometimes not. And still we can say 'something has shifted.' The cracking of orders is an aspect of the nature of exceeding. It does not require an 'ah ha' or even dramatic feeling to be felt and recognized as its own sub-process.

Second, we can say that bodily order exists AND that it is a kind of order that elaborates. We see this so clearly in watching an infant grow to childhood and then adulthood. The 'order' is there, in the DNA and environment, but humans are not limited by those orders. Our own order, its bodily complexity, is of the on-going kind of order. Gendlin (2007, June) says this so lucidly: "Living is always a fresh, further forming (all the way from the cells up)."

I've found Gendlin's article, *The Responsive Order* (1997) particularly valuable in helping me find my words and terms around this emerging concept of an endlessly elaborating bodily order that is freshly moving forward and retains the already formed form (of cells, organismic processes, of identity, etc.) though differently. In this seminal article, Gendlin argues that top-down derivations of findings (from pre-existing concepts, language, symbols, etc. found in either common use or specialized use families) are obviated by the two-way feedback of the experiential response (what we know as felt sensing). Gendlin insists we lose nothing of the logical order when we dip into our felt sense. In other words, we don't 'lose our minds' when we tap into the felt sense. No matter the activity, the felt sense functions responsively, not chaotically.

I am using this article in two ways. First, it serves as a precise description of how forms are exceeded. Second, it shows how our fresh concepts can retain bodily aliveness and still be empirical. Gendlin gives us some twenty detailed characteristics of his 'responsive order.' He uses and defines 'order' in a way that is useful to this project, and of course to many other applications as well. He says, "Whatever we study is very orderly indeed, but this cannot be the kind of order that conceptual systems have, since it can respond precisely to mutually exclusive systems" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 3). The responsive order and whole freshly derived systems like this theory, cannot be mutually exclusive, as they are responsive to each other and thus malleable to a certain extent vis-à-vis interactions.

Thus, in this way bodily order is precisely known, not mutually exclusive of other orders/orderings, and responsive in character. This point clicked and went very deeply inside me during a TAE phone session with Nada Lou in September 2007. I am including the raw notes as Nada transcribed them from this very brief phone session. It shows the subtle and yet emergent nature of working out an issue using TAE, but more so for us, it shows an elaboration of an instance of what the concept is all about.

‘Being’ in RESPONSIVE order.

There is an order ...

I am **participating** in the responsive order — there is no loss of **ME** as I am participating.

There is a ME there too.

I am participating with eyes looking out.

You are part of a responsive order therefore you participate and there is no loss of ME.

I am a responsive order.

This bit of work from TAE turned out to be a significant piece for me. I recall even now the joy of sensing inside these sentences. Yes, I can still say, I am a responsive order. Gendlin’s article not only helped me fashion something of this theory, but also shows us a way to think from experiencing that does not succumb to relativism or simple confusion. We know now through advances in physics, cellular and molecular biology for instance, that the most basic aspects of our physicality are changing all the time. DNA, once thought to be a blueprint, a static unit partially turned on at best, is now seen as a constantly self-ordering process. As quoted earlier, “Living is always a fresh, further forming (all the way from the cells up)” Gendlin (2007, June).

Nonetheless, *bodily order* is difficult to talk about in most western developed countries, especially with any experiential honesty. Speaking as one of the westerners, I can admit to this difficulty first hand. In my working with dying patients in hospice, schizophrenics, those claiming to be alien abductees, mystics and such, I have been pushed to see and eventually welcome the diverse complexity in human psychological experience. But, it hadn’t been until I started on this project, that I began to appreciate that what I was noticing had not been said before in this exact way: bodily orders exceed and retain. *Body* and *order* are now terms used in a specialized manner.

I could not find a place in psychology, sociology, physics, or religion for what was striving to be elaborated inside me. Somehow, I could not read the past into what I was doing. In a very practical way, the ‘doings’ going on inside me, especially the uncategorizable, wouldn’t let me put this into a form that already was. What is emerging in my work, and in those fields interested in understanding how we *are* already — while still retaining continuity in change — is a new, further development.

Sentence Three: *I am that kind of human who is elaborated innate bodily order.*

Perhaps its now possible to see how being human today encompasses many potential identities, each being of non-exclusive forms, systems, or patterns. ‘Gay’ in this way, is just one specialized kind of elaboration of a responsive bodily order. We have no idea if these systems, orders, or patterns, even exist outside of *this* bodily order. In fact, it seems clear to me that they do not. They couldn’t. Without a felt body, the self and other elaborations of our particular contemporary complexity could not exist. Yes, we could argue that the ‘body’ is present in some other form that is not purely physical. No matter where you venture in A

Process Model or elsewhere in Gendlin's writings, one thing comes across very clearly to me: the living body is fundamental. We might invent new ways of articulating what body is or means, but at least as I read Gendlin, it will always be, for his purposes and mine here, that kind of body that is physically known.

If we take the crux of each of my sentences, we have the beginnings of a theoretical engine. The sentences as I've written them contain crux words that I've underlined in the sentences below.

Sentence 1: It is in my nature to freshly become, to be always in transition.

Sentence 2: This fresh being I am (becoming) is a cracking open of orders, bringing an always-uniting present existence that is itself a continuing.

Sentence 3: I am that kind of human who is elaborated innate bodily order.

When I pull out these crux words and phrases and change them a bit more, I get this statement: **It is in our nature to always freshly become, to exceed our forms such that we are 'fresh beings' that always already are elaborating the universe endlessly.**

APPLICATIONS

If we can accept that human beings do indeed change, sometimes in easy moves and at other times in sudden, almost cataclysmic ways, we can think further about the precise nature of this change in many specified domains related to human living. As Gendlin has already shown through Focusing, change can be helped along. Focusing helps us establish with others and ourselves a trusting environment where acceptance is its fundamental attitude. In this environment, change can come smoothly and with flair. However, what of other less private domains in which a living notion of change is key?

There are at least five human domains that can benefit from further articulation of precisely how change works within them: personal growth, social change, spirituality, psychopathology, and psychotherapy. In brief, these areas of human living have many concepts applied to them, in some cases with less than desirable results. If we think for a moment about our nature as *fresh beings that continuously exceed and endlessly elaborate the universe*, we might then find and ask critical questions within any of these domains. We will be able to formulate precise and pertinent questions that come from within the domain and thus are useful to it. At this point, I have made only a small beginning toward formulating critical questions for these arenas of human living. I feel more will come.

CONCLUSIONS

I know this article might sound very, very heady or esoteric or overly optimistic. Really though, I'm trying to say something that I believe we all already 'get' intuitively. We change and yet we do not lose ourselves along the way. I've attempted to start a bit of theory making to address how this could be so. I've followed Gendlin's lead in some ways and ventured into my own territories in others.

We all know too well that we're not just passively connected — as if we have no influence on events and circumstances. We are actively engaging our world at many, many levels all the time, and exceeding the various and many forms we create and encounter. It's just that we don't generally notice the connections, and the ways we influence and are influenced. As Gendlin suggests in *Focusing*, our lives are connected to other lives close by, to other people in other places on our planet, and, in fact, to the whole planet and universe.

I've come to this sense of the way things are from observing myself, my friends, and many people who suffer, in one way or another. Some suffer from defeat or the shackles of their personal history. Some who suffer do so silently and without notice. I owe a great deal of this bit of theory-making to the work I and others do with persons such as these. I'm more convinced than ever that we are more than our problems, more than what even our biology or history or circumstances have delivered to us. Persons who have suffered in life, as well as people who haven't, have shown me that it is fundamental to being human to find ways forward in life. Even if the way forward is not clearly seen, we always retain the potential to become more than our given nature or circumstances seem to dictate. We are people built up from low origins to exceed even the most intractable of conditions.

I am very interested in exploring further the *nature of exceeding* as it points me back again and again into my sense that, "We are an on-going articulation of the universe, curious and joyful. We need only to remember to begin, from there our unique pathless path unfolds us like a starry night," (From <http://www.focusingnorthwest.com/resources.html>).

My statement: **It is in our nature to always freshly become, to exceed our forms such that we are 'fresh beings' that always already are elaborating the universe endlessly**, is alive for me and I hope for you as well. If I've made my case successfully, you can find yourself in it. Some bit of further living in you might be sparked to do your own elaborating, or to rest in the sense here that you already are an elaboration and nothing more need be done. In any case, no matter what more 'doings' go on from here, this is a start on a theory.

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