



## Thinking at the Edge: Where Theory and Practice Meet to Create Fresh Understandings

by Kevin C. Krycka

### Abstract

*This paper focuses on the use of concretely felt experience in phenomenological methodology and theory construction. Using the example of a stepwise process of theory making called Thinking at the Edge (Gendlin, 2004), the author shows how experience functions in the creation of a new theory on the self-as-becoming. In the process, he attempts to demonstrate how the ongoing work relating to creating a new theory of self is germane to phenomenology.*

*The paper draws on the major philosophical work of Eugene Gendlin (1962 & 2004) in his development of “The Philosophy of the Implicit” (POI), and the two distinct practices, Focusing (1982) and Thinking at the Edge (2004), which grew out of it. This philosophy forms the theoretical basis upon which the assertion is made that experience that is directly referred to can be utilized as the core of a method in the explication of theory. Two challenges facing phenomenological researchers and theorists who desire to utilize felt experience in their work are addressed, namely (1) the fact that the intimately felt aspect underlying the creation of new ideas is basically hidden from the view of others and is thus not verifiable in the usual way, and (2) the lack of a larger public language for articulating the process and progress that follows concretely from felt experience. It is argued that Thinking at the Edge provides scientists or specialists in any field, including phenomenologists, with a means whereby they can explicitly use felt experience in their work. It also opens the way for fresh theoretical language, of a kind characterized by reflexivity of felt experience, within the broader public language of the various fields, in the process specifically demonstrating how theory instances and exceeds itself.*

### Introduction

For many years I have been teaching an approach to theory construction called “Thinking at the Edge”, or TAE for short. The basic theory underlying TAE comes from the philosophical and psychological works of Eugene Gendlin. Gendlin, a student and fellow researcher of humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, has been concerned with developing a complete theory of human experience for nearly half a century. The fully developed theory is termed the

“Philosophy of the Implicit”, and is expounded in *The Process Model* (Gendlin, 1997a).

In the long process of his involvement in this project, Gendlin has developed two practices emerging from the Philosophy of the Implicit. These two practices, Focusing (Gendlin, 1982) and Thinking at the Edge (Gendlin, 2004), bring to phenomenological discourse the power of bodily felt experience. This paper addresses the benefit to phenomenology of Gendlin’s philosophy and demonstrates by means of a procedural example how felt experience concretely

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functions in the explication of a new theory of the nature of the self.

For those implementing phenomenological methods and philosophies, experience is regarded as a key aspect of human life out of which come, and upon which are built, the specific theories and methods that drive our research and scholarly activities. There is thus unlikely to be disagreement with the contention that experience, as a broad category, is fundamental to the creative expansion of human understanding along many dimensions. However, to say that it is experience concretely felt that is primordial in any human or organismic activity - be it thinking, feeling, perception, memory or any other subdivision we can think of - may create some interesting discussion and debate among us.

In moving toward his theory of human experience, Gendlin (1962) first articulated how experience functions *prior to* language, thought, feeling, and any another form of symbolization such as concepts and theories. He then developed this key insight into a radical experiential empiricism (Gendlin, 1997b) that places experience first, thus reversing the more common Newtonian ordering in which concepts organize and derive phenomena.

“Experience”, for Gendlin, is that to which we inwardly refer “naturally” as we go about our daily activities, often without our paying much attention to it at all. He extends this central notion of a natural side of human experiencing to include all living organisms. He asserts that every living organism is in ongoing bodily interaction with an intricate situation and with the universe (Gendlin, 1997a).

Hitherto, there has not been a complete theory of human experience that accounts for the ever-expanding ways in which we create new knowledge. New knowledge is generated through exceeding the forms and structures already in place. Forms such as gender, economics, being son or daughter, and so forth, are daily exceeded because we can enter into them, sense precisely where they do not entirely match our experience, and then sketch forward something new that carries with it the exceeded form. Following Gendlin, many others now actively place *entering-into-experience* as the foundation of their work as researchers, educators, scholars and artists, to name but a few.

### Toward a Wider Experiential Phenomenology

Since the publication of *Experience and the Creation of Meaning* (Gendlin, 1962), Gendlin has been intent on establishing how experience functions in a variety

of modes of human activity. His starting point has been to examine how experience functions in thinking and language, two kinds of examples from human activity that are basic to developing an experiential philosophy of human experience. He shows that there is a way *to think with-from more than* our patterns, concepts and theories would or can allow. The way *to think from* is already inherently in what he refers to as the “responsive order” in which humans interact within themselves and with others. A responsive order is contrasted, for the purpose of clarification, with the logical order that is recognizable in most contemporary philosophy and psychology.

An example of how the responsive order functions readily presents itself from the arts. Say, for instance, that you are interviewing a choreographer of ballet for your next phenomenological study. If your focus were on articulating the basic psychological structure in the creation of a new ballet, you most likely would ask how the person *knows* what comes next in the steps of the new ballet. Imagine this scene: Having just inquired as to how the next step is known to the choreographer, s/he pauses a minute and says, “Well, it goes something like this...”. S/he proceeds to take a pose and then slowly moves an arm upward, with his or her expression one of searching for something. An arm stops mid-air and waits there, to your eye merely floating. Then the arm moves again. Your subject then says, “There, just like that. That’s how I create the next movement.”

This is a prime example of how experience functions responsively in the creation of something new. The searching for something is evident, but the outcome is not known as of yet, at least not until it arrives. The responsive side of our human activity equation is one of interaction, unknown possible next moves, inchoate ideas, and genuine excitement.

The logical side of the equation is one of derived patterns and concepts, with even language, if understood as merely form and structure, conforming accordingly. Yet Gendlin points out that language of “... the body, the spoken word, the gesture ... is inherently always emerging from and intricately reflexive of the responsive side”. Language understood in this manner is also an exceeding of logical forms.

Gendlin (2004b) sees current philosophies as lacking any desire to define conceptual constructs and derive further steps from them. In relation to phenomenology he states, “Most philosophies gave up on phenomenology long ago, because it was recognized that neutral description is impossible” (p. 127).

Gendlin breaks through this apparent impasse in one primary way: by pointing out that there only is a “problem of neutrality” when we base our concepts on a locked understanding of how language functions in experience. To free the debate, he urges for a phenomenology that places experience first, one that does not privilege existing categories or determine new ones from the top down. In many of his writings, Gendlin points to the metaphoric nature of language, where natural textural understandings give way to richer and more intricate steps than would be possible from a static, conceptually locked position. This is a basic fact of humans and language, according to Gendlin. In a wide range of articles spanning five decades, Gendlin has introduced phenomenology to a new method of theory construction based in ongoing experience. As noted earlier, he places experience first, reversing the usual philosophical order “according to which doing (interaction, experiencing, procedure, finding, practice, ordinary speech, experiment ...) is considered derivative from pre-existing determinants (theory, history, language, culture, cognitive systems, comparison, horizon of conditions...)” (Gendlin, 1997b, p. 389).

Gendlin recognizes that we need these pre-existing organizing principles to check our work. To abandon these would be a foolish error. Instead, through his reversal, he places the logical order with its determinants *within the wider experiential order*. It is precisely in the use of this wider order that an experientially relevant phenomenology can enrich and enliven our post-postmodern world and allow for new constructs and theories that reflexively instance the ongoing nature of human living.

The way to *think more than* logical patterns and constructs comes from the explicit use of concretely felt experience. Felt experience directly functions in language when “we employ the capacity of language for new sentences. This capacity of language is rooted in the human body as reflexively sensed from the inside” (Gendlin, 2004b, p. 128). Gendlin suggests that a phenomenology that is experiential goes beyond relativism and postmodernism by building new conceptual models within the wider experiential order (Gendlin, 1973).

The project set forth in this paper concretely illustrates how experience functions in the creation of new theory. New theory derives from the reflexively sensed inside, as Gendlin puts it, such that the sensed can be made articulate in public language. It is not enough merely to enjoy the process of developing an idea privately, although that is the starting point of every new idea. In addition to this, we can now use felt experience to further the sensed inside us. Further

on in this paper there is a detailed explication of just how experience functions in Gendlin’s *Thinking at the Edge*.

### Challenges for a Phenomenologically Relevant Philosophy

There are at least two challenges confronting phenomenological researchers and theorists who desire to utilize felt experience in their work. Firstly, there is the fact that the intimately felt aspect underlying the creation of new ideas is basically hidden from the view of others and is not verifiable in the usual way. We rarely carry forward the immediacy we’ve felt in our ideas as we develop them and write our papers; neither do we readily utilize such subjective material in discussing or framing our work in a professional forum. Secondly, we lack a larger public language for articulating the process and progress that follows concretely from felt experience as its precision interacts with our emerging ideas and those already articulated in the public sphere. The newest, freshest, most exciting ideas we have may seem, even to us, mysteriously given.

In our day to day work, we may occasionally dip, or enter, into the concretely felt aspects of it that underlie it, without any need to lay out this very process of dipping and expanding that went on in our idea creation. Unfortunately, the accepted way to say *how* we in fact created this or that idea primarily relies on using concepts and ideas already in existence. If we leave out the most proximal aspect - our felt meaning - it would appear as if only the reformulation of existing knowledge is possible. As Gendlin’s many philosophical works show, this is an error of a most significant degree.

The second concern I have mentioned resides in the conscious uses of direct experience, or lack thereof. Scientists (both natural and social) and philosophers are a special group of folk who expend great amounts of time and energy in formulating this or that idea, testing its hypotheses, and hopefully disseminating them to the public. We are notoriously serious and private as well. Yes, particular ideas may well be best served by silence and protection - yet what about the way in which this particular idea came into being? This critical aspect of our work is publicly addressed by almost none of us.

What we lack is a language of the process and progress of ideas, as well as a method to apply to our emerging knowledge.

In addressing these two problems, I will draw on Gendlin's Philosophy of the Implicit and its method of theory creation, TAE. What follows is an example from my own work of how the felt immediacy of an emerging idea is first experienced and how its freshness is referred to again and again through a stepwise process in the articulation of a new theory.

### Overview of 'Thinking at the Edge'

Thinking at the Edge is a radical departure from mainstream methodology, and even from some phenomenological methods, in that it places the directly referred to felt sense of our idea, nascent and clumsy as it may be at first, at the centre of the process of a theory's articulation. Initially quite "personal" in nature, that which can be touched directly again and again in us forms the nexus to which we will return as we further explore and elaborate the terms of the idea or theory.

In a recent telephone conference call regarding his Philosophy of the Implicit, Gendlin stated, "Real thinking is rooted, emerging from *there* in me. It's an exciting, windy place where all the concepts are all trying to let energize something *there* - that's the edge and we like it! We like to think. It's just that we learned it backwards" (personal communication, May 1, 2005).

The "backwards" learning to which Gendlin refers is the use of existing concepts, patterns, symbolizing, and even language, as if they pre-determine experiential knowing. Typically, we feel something deep in us, something stirring there down deep that is rumbling to get out of us. Then we (prematurely) employ some existing pattern of knowledge that we know well. Picking up existing patterns (concepts, theories, symbols) first is a powerful kind of logical action embedded in linear ordering.

In the experiential order found in Focusing and TAE, experience is always placed first. Concepts or patterns 'out there' are already logical. They have been ordered and set out from, or derived from, experience. Their logic interacts with this experiential knowing, but does not precede it.

The logically ordered concepts may be useful, but they do not limit the knowing. In fact, we are constantly exceeding any logically ordered knowing, pattern, concept or symbolization we care to focus upon. Thus saying 'experience first' is an exciting phenomenological revision of empirical knowing and as such forms the crux of the TAE method.

TAE is not precisely like other phenomenological

methods, but does not negate them either. If we recall that the basis for this method of theory construction is the use of felt experience in the derivation of concepts and further practices, we can see just how useful a method it is. If felt experience were concretely and explicitly part of any phenomenological method, the benefit to the latter would come in exceeding prior patterns through fresh language that breaks the public understanding and carries forward precise experiential knowledge into any new derivatives or findings we can possibly imagine. Our new findings would then be more intricate and explicit, as well as more connected to actual human ongoing. Placing experience concretely felt at the centre of any phenomenological theory or method has the function of ensuring that the human will remain in all we do and can produce.

### TAE Steps

TAE can be taught in a step-by-step fashion. The fourteen steps comprising the entire process are summarized in Table 1 (Gendlin & Hendricks, 2004). Please refer back to the table as I demonstrate the steps, utilizing my own work on developing a new theory of self as becoming.

Table 1

*Thinking at the Edge: Summary of the Steps*

1	Letting the felt sense form
2	Find what is More-Than-Logical in your felt sense
3	Notice that you don't mean the standard definitions of the words
4	Write a sentence or fresh phrase to say what you mean
5	Expand your terms
6	Collect facets
7	Allow the facets to contribute a more detailed structure
8	Crossing facets
9	Writing freely
10	Choose the terms and link them
11	Ask into the inherent relation between the terms
12	Choose permanent terms and interlock them
13	Apply your theory outside your field (intermission step)
14	Expand and apply your theory in your field

One can think of the entire 14-step process in simpler terms as well. Depestele (2004) explains the intent behind the 14 steps as being "to help explicate *aspects*

(details, entities, ...) of my felt sense (or implicit knowing) about my area of knowing, and to organize them theoretically” (p. 25). She further talks of the first eight steps as *lifting out words* from the original felt sense of the idea and expanding upon them. The second part (steps 10-14) involves *building and applying* the newly formulated theory. This leaves one step, step nine, as a transition step in the entire process.

Admittedly, TAE involves many technical steps that the reader may not use in his or her own theory or idea construction. The spirit of the entire endeavour is to find words for some idea we have that might be useful for more than just ourselves. As such, TAE is being formulated for a public purpose; however, the reader may find the first half of the process particularly helpful in at least helping lay out the basic terms of the emerging idea under consideration. To that end, I will trace in more detail the beginning of my idea on the nature of a self that becomes, and leave the latter steps 10-14 in a condensed form, with reflection focused on their content and purpose in phenomenology.

#### *Steps One through Nine: Lifting out Words*

As mentioned above, the most crucial point in the formulation of any concept is the process by which we identify and lay out its central ideas or terms. The first eight steps provide a structure, based on the formal rules of logic, for the explication of main terms that are inherently, reflexively, instances of the felt sense of the idea. I've put in bold characters the specific TAE instructions to which I then respond.

#### **Step 1: Letting a felt sense form**

TAE emphasizes the centrality of directly sensing a knowing in us. In a basic introduction to TAE, the facilitator would ask that you take a moment to sense a certain knowing in you that needs to be articulated by you but for which you have no/few words that can be extended into public language at this point.

**Choose something that you care about that you would like to develop.**

*I'm thinking about a sense I have of how we always are amazed at, or rather, surprised by our personal growth ... the kind that is demonstrably known, at least to our own self. But it's more than this really. I want to say something about the self as change, but specifically about how self-change is always an exceeding, a breaking down of one thing for the next that isn't really there yet, but somehow is there too.*

Next in this step you ask yourself “What would I like these words to mean now?” And then sit back and see what comes in a bodily way with a distinct bodily-felt unclear edge.

**From this felt sense you write one short sentence. Underline the key word(s) or crux of it for you.**

*Self-as-becoming is always an exceeding of certain boundaries opening us up in new and uncertain ways.*

**Find a specific example of this when it actually happened.**

*I remember nearly drowning while being on a diving trip in Hawaii several years ago. I felt peaceful and somehow happy. Just as I began to close my eyes the guide pulled me up. On the boat I was shocked at how easy death seemed to be and how new everything seemed, how everything normal was cracked open.*

In this step you find your felt sense of the project, in my case roughly *the self as a kind of becoming*. I do not start my work from pre-ordered knowledge, to which I have had plenty of exposure. I start from what is in me that I sense needs to be said. Of course I am aware of the many orders of concepts concerning the nature of the self that I have already digested. My task here is to start inside rather than in the existing structures of knowledge. My example is critical at this point, as it provides a link to what I feel that I can return to if I venture too fast into the realm of what is already known. There are many more examples that I could give.

#### **Step 2: Finding the more than logical in the felt sense**

The more-than-logical, or illogical, in our felt sense directly refers us to the edge at which our idea operates in consciousness. We can touch that edge, going back and forth whenever we take the time to attend to it. In TAE, the illogical is a special instance of the felt sense as it becomes known to us, prior to distinguishing it from the sensing.

**Write an illogical or paradoxical sentence about your idea.**

*A self is and is not a becoming simultaneously without an apparent end, even when, especially when, the regular order of things is in jeopardy, when the orders crack.*

This step helps us to unlock our idea from all the others we already have about it. Writing in illogical form presents us with a *both/and* rather than the usual *either/or*, which is a hallmark of highly conceptually layered thinking. It is the first step toward a fresh understanding.

**Step 3: Notice that you don't mean the standard definitions of words**

TAE draws upon the reflexivity of language and experience. When we attend to the felt sense of an idea, we notice how the regular use of conventional words *doesn't exactly* say what we want it to mean. So, in this step of TAE, we take the liberty of exceeding words on purpose. To say to yourself "no words fit" is not a defeat in any way; it's a technique that helps dislodge the usual, the customary, the ordinary.

**To help the felt sense out, we take our underlined words from step one and write out our own definitions for them.**

*Self* - This word doesn't fit exactly. I mean a constant AND a becoming always. It may be disorienting to be always a becoming but the usual way is to imply continuity or sameness, and that doesn't work. What I mean is something fresher.

*Exceeding* - stretching forward from rootedness that can be stuckness

*Opening* - a sometimes painful breaking up, not always so sweet a thing, easy if you're not noticing what's going on

*Ontology* - 'a universe of discourses' ... on the nature of being ... an organizing with me in it.

Above, I wrote out my definitions of my key terms. You may have noticed that I added a new term, a very technical one: "ontology". In the process of seeing how the usual use of terms like "self" or "exceeding" didn't fit what I wanted to say, I became aware of another word that was wanted in the process. That word, "ontology", *felt a part of what I was saying* even though it did not appear at first. I chose to keep the new term.

**Return to your felt sense and find a new single word for a term.**

Using my first term "self", I dip into its felt sense and find a new term, "fresh".

*Fresh* - this hits something closer to what I meant by self in the first place. There is something always fresh in my understanding of

*self that doesn't erase the quality of, or experience of, continuity.*

This substituted term, "fresh", resonates with my felt sense of my entire idea. I choose to keep it close by as I continue. This process of taking out a main term and finding new ones in its place continues for each of the terms. At the end of this step, you have a lot of new data about your central idea. It keeps filling out in new and sometimes surprising ways.

Once again we are playing with our idea while we engage the felt sense of it. Here we are deriving new terms through a kind of zigzagging between logical order and the experiential order. I imagine that this is a rather common process, which many of us in phenomenology are used to following quite naturally. We go back and forth with words (terms) that seem to fit in one moment and then don't in the next. We settle on some words rather than the others and our idea takes shape. In TAE all this is quite explicit, while for most it may be implicit and private.

**Step 4: Write a sentence or fresh phrase to say what you wanted each of the words to mean**

Now we take the single new word, in my case the word "fresh", and write an entirely new phrase or sentence such that it says what I mean it to say. I do this with each of the new words from the previous step, of which I've set out only one such term for brevity. This process continues to stoke the fires of my idea by encouraging original ways to speak about it.

In writing about her new theory of unconditional positive regard in psychotherapy, Hendricks (2004) clarifies that

The point of this step of TAE is to generate new phrases which can say what could not be said before. A felt sense may seem to be particular to me, but will be understandable by many people when I have articulated it. My articulation will create it in them. (p. 57)

**Take your new terms ("fresh") from step three and write a fresh statement.**

By "fresh" I wanted to mean exciting and masterful forward leaning that is a pointing to the original nature of being that is not in a backwards-looking way only.

I continue this process of writing fresh sentences with all the new terms I generated from step three. I feel

into the inherent nature of each of them and let a new phrase emerge that better conveys what I mean. For convenience, I use the starting phrase, “By (...) I wanted to mean ...”.

**Step 5: Expand what you wanted each word to mean by writing fresher, more linguistically unusual, sentences**

This step involves generating even more about your idea. Expanding its central notions, or key terms, from step four, I will add intricacy and detail to the idea. The products of this step yield phrases that are often not common in the public language. In fact, they may not be understood by anyone but me at this point.

My students have often said of this step that it is the most energizing. When I probe further, they speak of how it lets them go freely into the idea in such a way that many come to realize that they know how to think.

**Using the main words or phrases from step four, write a somewhat odd sentence or two in order to expand even further what you now mean by each of the words or phrases: underline what’s new and important in each.**

*By an “exciting and masterful forward leaning” I mean to point to the bracing energy rising and falling that is not naïve or romantic, that is capturing me in its wind.*

*By “pointing to the original nature of being” I mean directionality and focusing intention such that it’s both inward and outward.*

*By “not in a backwards-looking way only” I mean multiplicity-sensing an interactional placing of me with all that is.*

**Write a “string” of the original words and the main fresh phases in the underlined slot in your sentence from step one.**

*Self-in-change is a bracing energy that captures me in its wind, directionally focusing intention by allowing for multiplicity sensing, thus making of me an interactional placing that always exceeds certain boundaries and opens us up in new and uncertain ways.*

What is always interesting to me at this point is that I feel in a way finished. I want to take a break here. I’ve followed closely my felt sense of my idea at each step and have even been a bit surprised by how the idea of self in change has expanded. The main idea expressed here is clearly in private language form. It’s not ready for publication! I may sense the need to

back off from it for a while or to move further. Either way, I have substantially increased the complexity of the idea and have seen it extend in unpredictable fashion. This shows me that I’m onto something.

Gendlin’s *Process Model* (1997a) refers to the genuine excitement that comes each time we logically link a new term, or new terms, from the experiential order. We are deriving living concepts, awareness, perception, and much else, without reducing it or encompassing it into prior forms and symbolizations. For a phenomenologist this deriving hits at the heart of many, or indeed any, human endeavours we care to study. Our subjects of inquiry are a deriving, as are our subject-participants.

**Steps 6, 7, 8 & 9**

I have condensed the next four steps for the purpose of this discussion. I will clarify them and explain how they would be used in the development of a theory. I leave out further elaboration of them primarily because they involve similar processes as the previous steps of identifying examples of the idea and interlocking them, thus adding even more detailed structure.

**Step 6: Collect Facets**

Facets are actual times when the thing I’m working on happened. They are specific examples of the as yet unarticulated knowing I have. In this step you identify concrete examples, not abstractions, and give them a one or two word label. They have a specificity and complex structure that is not found in an abstraction. The number of facets is limited only by the time available. Literally, I have collected thirty or more examples of my idea. For the sake of managing this new data, TAE instructions have you work with only three of them.

**Step 7: Allow the facets to contribute more detailed structure**

The three instances (facets) of your idea are now examined for their inherency, or structure. The structure is revealed in the patterning we can sense from/in each. In TAE, the conceptual patterns are connected to the facets. This is an important part of the theory behind TAE. We enter into the intricacy of the example facet and let more detailed structure emerge. This process is one of explicating the thing itself without losing the texture of it. It’s just that now we are giving its texture words. The words for the texture are its pattern.

**Step 8: Crossing facets**

Here we step back from the patterns, or inherencies, we've located in our facets. By taking the textural pattern of Facet 1 and let it interact with the pattern in Facet 2, we can now sense how the whole central thing is in both. Many times, crossings occur quite naturally as we think further into an idea. This step is included when we do not readily notice how our facets are actually in some way instances of the central thing in our idea. While not saying that they are the same kind of instance, we can assert that, since they are from the one idea, they are inherently connected.

In the above three steps we develop our kind of truth further. It is not an autistic kind of truth that bears little connection or resemblance to any living organism or behaviour. Our truth is an interaction that does not shy away from any inherency we noted from our inward attending.

**Step 9: Writing freely**

At this point we simply allow ourselves a good amount of time to freely write out any thing at all regarding our idea. It is a blank space where we can note what we've learned about the idea so far. Most people will not need to continue beyond this point. The idea has been fleshed out, its detail made clearer. It is finished, even if just for now.

Recall that we began with an edge, a felt sense of something needing to be said. We've fed and encouraged that inchoate certainty to the point that we can freely write about it. We can now not only speak from the felt sense, but follow it as it carries the idea forward. Our thinking is an interaction. Unlike traditional philosophy and science, whose main tenets remain Newtonian in nature, and where inherently meaningless bits come together vis-à-vis some connections existing on the outside, ours is a reversal of that usual order.

**Steps 10-14: Building theory**

The rest of the TAE steps help lay out the terms that will form the crux of our theory in public language. We take our implicit knowing articulated in the previous steps and make it communicable (Gendlin & Hendricks, 2004). These steps are highly technical in nature and follow more formal rules of logic. The main point in these few remaining steps is to further feed your idea by building an experiential-logical machine that will generate further and further aspects of it. The machine provides a steady mechanism for enabling our bodily interaction to sketch out the next

bits of the idea. The primary cogs in this machine are crossing and dipping. Simply put, when we provide the experiential side with an order, which can be broken by it, we are free to use the logical side without fear of it dominating. Crossing and dipping are two concepts Gendlin derives in *The Process Model* (Gendlin, 1997a).

In developing my theory, I spend a significant amount of time on these steps, getting a feel for how each of my terms interlock and may be the other. I found this part of using logic very exciting personally. By dipping back into my felt sense, I can ask how these things are inherently connected and how they are not. The result is an experientially based, strong set of basic principles or terms that will be used in building my theory.

Below is an example of my process in these steps:

*I asked myself about the inherency between 'uniting present' and 'cracking open of orders'. It is clear to me that being present means uniting multiple streams of knowing simultaneously, almost without knowing at times. The uniting of which I'm speaking is a special case of sensing the experience of being present. In this kind of being present there comes the breaking apart of established orders of perception, concept, even thought and feeling. Both are absolutely true of the nature of a self that is becoming.*

I keep going and further elaborate and refine my ideas. Strands of ideas from other parts of my work come together and carry forward. I don't stop until I'm sure that most of everything I need to say about my idea is laid out.

Once again, we are using formal logic to help us along. It may seem very strange to some of us to use formal procedures of logic with experience. I certainly found it so when I first began using TAE.

As stated above, these final steps are designed to help us begin to write a formal theory. In formal logic, all terms are not merely substitutes for each other; rather they ARE each other. The beauty, and perhaps confusion, of these steps is that we can keep on feeding our formal idea with illogical sentences with the effect of articulating new aspects of the theory. In fact, in my actual work on my theory, I produced many sentences that included ideas I had rejected earlier on in the process. My theory is producing more questions and connections, generating new terms and links. In total, I'm now confident that I

have something unique to say about the nature of a self that is becoming.

This is my new statement with which I will work to formulate my theory:

***The nature of the self is to freshly become. This fresh being I am becoming is a cracking open of orders, bringing an always uniting present existence that is itself a continuing.***

I will now keep working on this statement, letting questions, objections, contradictions, and affirmations arise as they no doubt should and will. I have firm knowledge of my idea now, much more so than at the beginning, even though I am not finished.

### Conclusion

How the logical and the experiential orders work together is a new main philosophical question. (Focusing.org, 2006)

Phenomenologists study humans within nature. The philosophical theory and methodological practices of phenomenology are extended in Gendlin's Philosophy of the Implicit. TAE is a kind of practice or method for creating new theory that exactly conveys our experience in nature while using public language to do so. The method of TAE is *in nature* in that it utilizes concretely felt experience and derives new understanding from it. The theory behind TAE does not suggest relativism of ideas nor endeavours for their own sake. TAE is a way to release language from its confines so that something new can be said and added to our existing knowledges. Our concepts and knowledge encompass neither our experience nor our situations. Yet, the experiential method of TAE helps create new knowledge that explicitly follows humans in nature.

Gendlin (2004a) states that TAE empowers people to speak. I've found that it lets people remember that they know how to think. Anyone with little training can take on the TAE process and get to a firm understanding of the something they know inside that needs to be said by them, and only them. This is first recognized when we come to understand that the usual established words or theories will never be able

to say what we mean exactly. "New phrasing is possible because language is always implicit in human experiencing and deeply inherent in what experiencing is. Far from reducing and limiting what one implicitly lives and wants to say, a fresh statement is physically a further development of what one senses and means to say" (Gendlin, 2004a, p. 5).

Gendlin further states that TAE has a social purpose that is phenomenologically relevant. His theory of human experience builds the inter-human world further. The imposition of order in thought, language, and so forth, is supplanted by the notion of interaction. All existing orders (articulations, distinctions of ...) are exceeded in the crossing of the differentiations. We do this all the time. Any time I am thinking, I am thinking new things. It is especially noted when I apply a structured process such as Focusing or TAE, but neither is essential for this new thought to appear. Social change occurs when people begin to realize that they can think and apply their thinking in ways important and meaningful to them and their situations.

In my own phenomenological work, TAE has enabled an articulation of an idea that has been sitting in me for many years. A certain phenomenon was 'in there' in some sense and is now newly so 'out there' in another. The power of experience for phenomenology lies in our ability to utilize concretely felt experience to create new and better theory with concepts linked to living human beings.

As pointed to at the beginning of this paper, phenomenology has two main challenges to confront if it intends to work with experience concretely. As authors, we need to talk about the process of discovery of ideas and theory in the public language. We also need to refer directly to our experience as we form our ideas. With the method of TAE, there is now a genuine process available to phenomenologists that uses experience in whatever area of work we find ourselves. This presents exciting possibilities for academics, science, social thought, drama, art - indeed, any realm in which humans come together and interact and have the felt need to say.

### About the Author

Kevin Krycka is an associate professor in the psychology department at Seattle University, where he spent six years as its chair. Since joining the faculty in 1989, he has taught graduate and undergraduate courses while conducting qualitative research utilizing Gendlin's Experiential Theory, Focusing, and TAE. Dr Krycka has extensive experience in teaching Focusing to those in the medical and various healthcare professions (therapists, body workers,

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acupuncturists, and so forth) as well as to persons with serious and life threatening conditions such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, EBV, MS, and chronic pain conditions. He is a certified Focusing Instructor and has offered Focusing and TAE workshops in Japan, Holland, Sweden, Italy, Denmark and the USA. Currently, he is developing a new theory of self that states that the self emerges from the responsive order (also referred to by Gendlin as the experiential order) and can only be known and studied from an experiential basis.

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