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TOWARD A PROCESS UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS
EXPERIENCE: WILLIAM JAMES AND EUGENE GENDLIN

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Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Ottawa as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

John J. Shea was born December 29, 1940, in Havertown, Pennsylvania. He received the Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy from Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania, in 1964. He received the Master of Arts degree in Theology from Augustinian College, Washington, D.C., in 1968. The title of his thesis was The Concept of the Moral Imperative in the Ethics of Paul Tillich. He received the Master of Arts degree in Philosophy from the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., in 1970. The title of his thesis was The Ontological Foundations of the Ethics of Paul Tillich. He received the Master of Pastoral Studies (Counseling) degree from Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Ontario, in 1974.

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INTRODUCTION

Although he figures in this thesis only in a minor way, let me begin with two images from the writings of Paul Tillich. Often Tillich spoke of being "on the boundary," for example, on the boundary between reality and imagination or between theology and philosophy.¹ This thesis is on the boundary between religion and psychology. More accurately, this thesis explores a phenomenon which is at the interface of religious experience and phenomenological psychology. This phenomenon is best captured by the terms "religious feeling" or "religious experiencing."²

Since the time of Schleiermacher, "feeling" has had a prominent place in religion. Many religious thinkers have struggled with it, seeing it as somehow at the heart of religious experience, as somehow being the matrix out of which the various religious concepts and creeds arise. In psychology as well, especially in the more recent psychotherapies, "feeling" has become an operative concept both in therapeutic theory and practice. This thesis which is on the boundary between religion and psychology draws from both disciplines in offering a

1 See Paul Tillich, On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch, New York, Scribner's, 1966.

2 Throughout the thesis these terms are employed interchangeably. "Religious feeling," if used alone, tends to be taken as speaking only of religious emotions. I use both terms in quotation marks to indicate the process-phenomenon which I articulate at the beginning of Chapter IV.

re-description of the function of "feeling" in religion.

This dissertation also rests on the border between academic and pastoral concerns. It looks at the way "feeling" and "experience" have been construed by thinkers interested in exploring religious phenomena. Yet, at the same time it is concerned with the way religious experiencing can be understood as a process of growth furthering and deepening a person's relationship to God.

A second image of Tillich which helps situate my point of departure in this research is, in a way, a methodological statement. It is the aphorism: "The place to look is all places, the place to stand is no place at all."³ This image suggests that I not place myself exclusively in religion, or in psychology, or even in philosophy. I feel, in fact, that if these different disciplines were personified, they would often be unmindful of just where their own feet were planted. It is as if they were standing in a dense ~~fog~~ or were suffering from a numbness below the knees. While they think they are on solid ground, often they cannot sense their feet at all. As I focus on "feeling" or "experiencing" as it helps to explicate a process understanding of religious experience, for the most part I want to draw from what has been described in religion and in psychology, but the actual

³ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, New York, Harper & Row, 1967, p. 26.

phenomenon of "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling" that I describe in the beginning of Chapter IV is, as I have indicated, on the boundary. It underlies (and in that sense it transcends) the different disciplines trying to capture it.

The way I felt drawn to work toward a process understanding of religious experience was through a fascination with the thinking of two very gifted phenomenologists of feeling. One is William James and the other is Eugene Gendlin. William James, of course, was a philosopher, psychologist, and religious thinker writing at the turn of the Century. Reading his Varieties of Religious Experience,⁴ I became aware how consistently he relied on the concept of "feeling" to describe what was primary in religious experience. What also caught my attention in the Varieties, and especially in some of his other writings, was that he intuited an intrinsic connection between feeling and a process of change, or, in his terms, a process of conversion or unification within the person. While he was hard pressed to clearly articulate this connection between feeling and inner transformation, his need to be radically empirical and his genius for description coupled to produce an inchoate understanding of feeling as a process, an understanding which seemed to have great heuristic

⁴ William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, New York, Collier, 1961.

value.

As I became familiar with the work of Eugene Gendlin I was excited by the way he described "feeling" (which he also called "experiencing") as directly related to personality change and growth. Gendlin, a philosopher, psychologist, and psychotherapist who is presently at the University of Chicago, was wrestling with the questions: How do people change? How can the process of therapeutic transformation be best described and facilitated? In trying to answer these questions he evolved his notion of "experiencing" or "feeling." Basically he came to understand this feeling as the pre-verbal, bodily felt aliveness of the person which, when directly paid attention to, could open up and change.

At this point I had the germinal question around which my thesis research developed. The question is: Why is it not possible to speak of a kind of religious feeling or religious experiencing which is directly related to the change and growth of the person? James most often describes religious feelings as contents in the person as, for example, happiness, peace, or oneness. He says little about how these contents come to be in the person or how they function in the person's manner of living. Gendlin sees feeling as a primary, underlying, felt process out of which contents of whatever kind can arise. For Gendlin contents as such are important only as they symbolize, challenge, or resolve the underlying living

process of the person. In this thesis I am working toward a process understanding of religious experience. I draw from James by seeing feeling as at the heart of religion, and I rely on Gendlin for an understanding of feeling or experiencing as inherently a living process of the person.

Before I outline the way I intend to proceed in the chapters of this dissertation, let me mention some personal experiences that have given impetus to my research. Frequently in pastoral counseling a counselee will make general religious statements which seem at variance with what he or she is actually experiencing. I remember, for example, one woman who told me quite firmly: "I know that God loves me; He loves all His creatures." At the same time this woman felt with chilling anxiety that she had been completely abandoned by God. She felt beyond God's help, convinced that God did not and could not love her at all. It seems that the practical theologies people profess are often far different than their actual feelings in relation to God. It is this felt relation to God which is most important because this is the reality being lived by the person. Yet, because of seemingly appropriate and commonly shared religious responses, this underlying felt relationship to God--what I am calling "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling" in Chapter IV--rarely gets focused on or conceptualized at all.

INTRODUCTION

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I recall several other experiences which helped set the direction of this present research. I think of a summer spent working with young people in a drug program. In trying to sense the fabric of the lives of these young people, I began to realize that while they had had a great many experiences--especially related to drugs, sex, and music--there did not seem to be very much meaning for them in these experiences. I wondered just how it was that personal meaning came to be, and I was left trying to understand how it was that experience could be meaningful or meaningless.

I remember, too, a very bright philosophy student who asked me if I would be willing to meet with her professors of psychology and physics. She thought it would be interesting, she said, because what I was saying in class about the nature of the person was in almost direct contradiction to what they were teaching. As it turned out we all got together on two afternoons. I am afraid I cannot quite communicate the basic unbelievableness of the sessions. It was like the mixing of apples and oranges. I was amazed at their completely deterministic view of the person, while they were equally struck by what appeared to be my naïve ignorance in the area of science. Conversation was almost impossible. We hardly spoke the same language even when we used the same words. This experience left me with an all-too-immediate sense of how fragmented academe really was and of how difficult it

must be for the ordinary student to integrate the insights of those disciplines focusing on the person. I felt then-- and I feel even more strongly now--that this is an area where university curricula and research have been grossly inadequate. I made myself a promise that whatever further academic work I did would be toward an integrated understanding of the human person.

Now that I have mentioned my fascination with the approach to "feeling" of James and Gendlin and have related some of the experiences which influenced and animated the present research, let me outline the way I am proceeding in the thesis.

Chapter I, "Important Issues in Religious Experience," is a clearing of the ground. I begin this chapter by presenting some insights on religious experience that surfaced in my study of philosophy, theology, and pastoral counseling. Next, I look briefly at three issues in the psychology of religion, issues which raise questions concerning the methodology involved in approaching religion as a process of experiencing or feeling. Then, with these first two sections providing a context and sense of direction, I summarize the resources to be found in James's and Gendlin's understanding of feeling and experiencing. The chapter concludes with a statement of the thesis question which is: Can I draw on the phenomenology of religious feeling of William James and on the phenomenon

of "feeling" or "experiencing" of Eugene Gendlin in order to describe and elaborate "religious feeling" or "religious experiencing" as a felt, living process of the person?

Chapter II is on "The Role of Feeling in William James's Understanding of Religious Experience." First, I look at James's own religious experience to see how it influenced his writing of The Varieties of Religious Experience. Next, the characteristics of "feeling" in the Varieties are carefully described from several perspectives to see how the concept functions for him. Then, some of James's other writings are explored to see the way he connects "feeling" with a sense of process. The chapter concludes with some critical reflections.

Chapter III, "The Experiencing Process of Eugene Gendlin," is a comprehensive description of Gendlin's understanding of "experiencing" or "feeling." First, a basic definition of experiencing is offered. Next, experiencing is described as what it essentially is, that is, an interpersonal process of therapeutic change. Then, some further characteristics of experiencing are detailed which are helpful for seeing religion as an ongoing process of the person. Some critical reflections complete the chapter.

Chapter IV presents "A Process Understanding of Religious Experience." It begins with an articulation of the basic aspects of "religious experiencing" or "religious

feeling" as these aspects are drawn from the thinking of James and Gendlin. Next, the "religious experiencing" just articulated is given perspective through a review of the questions and issues raised in Chapter I. Then, the meaning that "religious experiencing" has for therapeutic change and growth is explored. And finally, some implications of "religious experiencing" for a basic description of what could be called "experiential religion" are drawn.

The dissertation ends with some conclusions and suggestions for future research. These are followed by an annotated bibliography.

CHAPTER I

QUESTIONS AND ~~ISSUES~~ IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

As I mentioned in the Introduction, this chapter is a clearing of the ground. It also involves some sample-taking and analysis of what different writers have said about "experience" and "feeling"--especially as they are related to religion. Two concerns run together in this chapter. One is to present some of the major questions, issues, and insights which moved me toward delineating religious experience as a process of feeling. The reasons why I want to focus on religious experience as a feeling process are as important, I find, as how I actually go about it. The other concern is that in looking at some of these major questions and issues on religious experience I can provide a contextual background, which will show why I have chosen to work with the "feeling" and "experiencing" described by James and Gendlin.

This chapter is in three sections. In the first section, I sketch some of the thinking on "experience" that influenced me and helped in a general way to set the direction of the present research. I look briefly at Gabriel Marcel, a philosopher who feels that concepts must always be in the service of living experience. Then, I mention some of the things I learned from Paul Tillich, a theologian who is especially insistent that the experiencing subject not be

forgotten in religious experience. Finally, in this first section, I summarize some of the challenges I found in the work of Carl Rogers, a psychologist who has such a broad understanding of "experience" that I felt religious kinds of experience could be included.

The second section of this chapter deals with three issues that fall within the purview of psychology of religion. These are somewhat neglected issues which, if sufficiently explicated, begin to show the significance of approaching religious experience as a process of feeling. The first issue I call "Personal Experience Influencing the Methodology in Religious Experience." The point here is that a thinker's personal experience of religion or lack of it must enter into his understanding of what religious experience is and how it ought to be approached. If a given thinker has no living sense of relation with God, then his methodology can tend to interpret or explain religion from a non-religious perspective. To illustrate this point I use two examples. One is in the person of James Leuba, an American pioneer in the psychology of religion, who applies a functional psychology to religious experience. The other example is Sigmund Freud, who without any acknowledged religious feelings of his own, approaches religion through his psychoanalytic framework.

A second, related, and yet far more complex issue is what is called "The Subject-Object Dichotomy of Religious

Experience." I examine this dichotomy because if religious experience is initially described either as discreet subjective feelings or as a God understood only as an external object, then the living immediacy of the experience of God is lost, severed and reduced by definition. To illustrate how the subject-object dichotomy of religious experience can be consciously avoided I draw from Max Scheler, the German phenomenologist. To show how this dichotomy of religion comes about I describe briefly some of the thinking of the empirical theologian, Henry Nelson Wieman.

The last issue I take up in the second section of this chapter is "The Role of Feeling in Religious Experience." I review helpful ways "feeling" in religion has been understood by two very influential German theologians, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto. I point out how both these men see "feeling" as some kind of living process in the person. Both also see "feeling" as primary in religious experience, as a datum out of which various creeds and beliefs come.

With sections one and two providing a context for approaching religious experience as a process, in the final section of the chapter I indicate briefly how aspects of the thinking of James and Gendlin respond to the questions and issues that have been raised. Then I state the central question of the thesis.

I must apologize to the reader for introducing so many different thinkers in this chapter. I do so because I find it helpful to deal with ideas that are part of the fabric of some person's actual thinking. In fact, this concrete approach to concepts is one of the most important things I learned from the French philosopher, Gabriel Marcel.

1. Reflections on Experience and Religious Experience.

In reflecting on the academic concerns that sparked my interest in working toward a process understanding of religious experience, I find that I have always been attracted by writers whose thinking is experientially rooted. There are three writers in particular who have influenced my own way of looking at experience and religious experience and who in a general way have helped set the direction of this present research. These three writers are: a) Gabriel Marcel, a philosopher who insists that concepts always be in dialogue with actual experience; b) Paul Tillich, a theologian who emphasizes the role of the experiencing subject in religious experience; and c) Carl Rogers, a psychologist who speaks of "experience" within the context of therapeutic change and growth.

a) Gabriel Marcel in Philosophy.

When I studied philosophy as an undergraduate, I became very interested in existential modes of thinking and in different phenomenologies as ways of understanding the fuller context and dimension of human living and interacting. Something in this way of approaching the human person captured my attention so that when I read I felt revelation taking place. There was a sense that something was opening up before me which I had not seen or understood before, yet that something was intimately connected with me. My reading in existentialism and phenomenology began to "give me to myself." It touched my experiencing with a description of existence that seemed so often to fit my own life.

The one philosopher who came to influence me most at that time was Gabriel Marcel. Marcel's philosophy was a concrete rather than an abstract approach to human existence. It began with "I experience" as the "original datum."¹ For him philosophy provided "the means for experience to become aware of itself, to apprehend itself."² His method, as he once described it, consisted "in working my way up from life to thought and then down from thought to life again, so that

¹ Gabriel Marcel, Creative Fidelity, trans. by Robert Rosthal, New York, Noonday, 1964, p. 16.

² Ibid., p. 16.

I may throw more light upon life."³ The act of reflection was linked "as bone is linked with bone in the human body" to living, personal experience.⁴

It was in order to make clear the intimate relation between reflection and experience that Marcel made his important distinction between primary and secondary reflection. In primary reflection the subject separates himself from the immediacy of his experience, thereby setting up a world of objects or things over against the self. Secondary reflection, however, is a recognition of the incompleteness of this primary mode of thinking. In secondary reflection the subject is reunited, though now in a slightly different way, with the world of his experience. As Marcel phrased it: "Roughly, we can say that where primary reflection tends to dissolve the unity of experience which is first put before it, the function of secondary reflection is essentially recuperative; it reconquers that unity."⁵

Marcel's philosophical approach was, then, highly experiential. Advocating a phenomenological point of view, he criticized the philosopher who would not immerse himself

3 Gabriel Marcel, The Mystery of Being, Vol. I, Chicago, Regnery, 1950, p. 51.

4 Ibid., p. 97.

5 Ibid., p. 102-103.

in this approach because, as Marcel pointed out, "far from the richness of experience he is substituting mere abstract schemas" and "far from transcending experience, he has not yet reached the stage of grappling with it."⁶ In fact, Marcel went so far as to say--in a way that I found startling at first--"beyond all experience there is nothing."⁷ The judgment of something to be outside experience is itself experiential, that is, it is made from within experience.

When Marcel came to a discussion of the possible meanings of religious transcendence, he insisted as well: "Not only does the word 'transcendent' not mean 'transcending experience,' but on the contrary there must exist a possibility of having an experience of the transcendent as such, and unless that possibility exists the word can have no meaning."⁸

As I reflect now on the influence Marcel's thought has had upon me, I am struck by how strong it has been on my subsequent understanding of experience and on the direction of this thesis research. In addition to a profound respect for experience in its immediacy, the two most important insights I gained from him centered around religion in relation to thought. First, I was challenged to understand

6 Ibid., p. 116.

7 Ibid., p. 59.

8 Ibid., p. 57-58.

religion and the formulation of theology in light of experience. I gradually came to realize that if religious beliefs are not experientially based, they can easily distort the very reality they are trying to convey. I became aware that religious thinking is personally meaningful for me only if I can tie it in with some aspect of my own experience. Second, thinking has to be in the service of actual living. Reflection is a grappling with experience, but it can very easily become abstracted from the immediate experience it is meant to elucidate. With Marcel's influence I began to realize that it is only in relation to concrete experience that thinking lives, moves, and has its being. It seemed that religious thinking needed to function this way as well.

The general question the thinking of Marcel raises for me as I approach religious experience as a process is: Can I find a way of working with religious experience that will respect its immediacy and yet be adequate as reflection? And if for many people religious experience is a very meaningful and integrative aspect of life, can I find a way of articulating it as it is actually lived, a way of articulating which is unifying, yet one not distorting or claiming too much?⁹

⁹ My thinking here, stimulated by Marcel, is that the conceptualizations of religious experience are so highly formalized or ritualized that the experience is thought to be unusually rare. People who otherwise might be considered quite religious often have a hard time conceptualizing and reflecting on their living experience of God.

b) Paul Tillich in Theology.

My interest in experience as approached in existential and phenomenological thinking continued as I studied theology. Here the one person who spoke to me more than any other was Paul Tillich. Although his thinking revealed a rich combination of several traditions, what was most clear and attractive to me was his focus on the actual experience of the person in the human situation. Tillich formally described this reality of the person as situated in what he termed "the self-world correlation."¹⁰ As he observed: "Man experiences himself as having a world to which he belongs. The basic ontological structure is derived from an analysis of this complex relationship. Self-relatedness is implied in every experience."¹¹ This emphasis on the person as related made Tillich's thinking especially appealing to me and made his theology ~~into~~ something with which I could identify.

The theological method proposed by Tillich was a method of correlation. It consists in describing the human situation as a kind of question to which a religious response could be found.¹² It is out of the experience of human

¹⁰ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, New York, Harper & Row, 1967, p. 171.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 169.

¹² It should be noted that in his major work, Systematic Theology, Tillich follows the method of correlation in format, even though he is not always faithful to it in fact.

finitude, for example, that the question of a transcendent God can be asked and answered. It is out of the experience of sin and estrangement that the answer of Christ as the New Being can be received.

In retrospect, I was attracted to Tillich's approach to theology because he would not leave the experiencing subject aside. Consistent with his methodology, he defined religion as "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of life."¹³ Although this definition is problematic for me, it makes two points that are clearly significant. The first is that how God is experienced is of theological significance and must be taken into account if we are to understand actual religious living. The second point is that in allowing for experience as an essential part of religion, Tillich seems to be focusing on religious phenomena not so much in terms of content as in terms of a kind of meaning or direction for living which is integrative.

The question that Tillich's thinking raises for me now as I work toward a process understanding of religious

¹³ Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions, New York, Columbia University Press, 1964, p. 4-5. See also Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1958, p. 11.

experience is: How can the experiencing subject be seen as an integral part of religious experience? And if the experiencing subject is taken seriously as part of religious experience, what does this do to the way the contents of the experience can be understood?

c) Carl Rogers in Pastoral Counseling

A third and more concrete encounter with "experience" came for me in the training I received in pastoral counseling. In this area I was challenged by the need to understand the dynamics of interpersonal experiencing and the ways in which psychology and religious faith could be brought to bear in an integrated way with this experiencing.

In terms of theory I found myself caught up mainly with the work of Carl Rogers. Rogers has a way of staying close to his own experience as a therapist and of gradually explicating certain aspects or characteristics that are important. I not only liked the phenomenological nature of his concepts, but I also found that much of my own counseling experience was animated by what he was saying.

As a formal concept, "experience" is the cornerstone of Rogers' whole understanding of personality development and change. It is defined open-endedly as "all that is going on within the envelope of the organism at any given moment

which is potentially available to awareness."¹⁴ What is important is that the experience of the organism be allowed into awareness so that it can become part of the person's self-concept. "Congruence" or the "fully functioning person" is defined by Rogers as a harmony between organismic experience and the individual's awareness and acceptance of himself.¹⁵

Rogers' formulation of experience within the context of the functioning of personality was helpful to me in several ways. In the first place, in his experiential approach to therapy he is not satisfied with only an explanation of what is the cause of personality dysfunction or blocked growth. Rather, his description is of an actual interpersonal process whereby growth and personality change do occur, given the proper therapeutic conditions.¹⁶

A second way in which Rogers was helpful is that he describes "experience" in such an open-ended way that I found religious kinds of experience could be included. In fact, I

¹⁴ Carl R. Rogers, "A Theory of Therapy, Personality, and Interpersonal Relationships, as Developed in the Client-Centered Framework," in Psychology: A Study of a Science, Vol. 3, ed. by Sigmund Koch, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1959, p. 197.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 205-206.

¹⁶ See Carl R. Rogers, "The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change," in Journal of Consulting Psychology, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1957, p. 95-103. The three most important conditions mentioned by Rogers are "empathy," "congruence," and "unconditional positive regard."

was challenged to understand the phenomenon of living religion as being within experience, if it would be part of the personality and its growth.

Finally, Rogers describes experience in terms of "feeling." Experience is of feelings which are "the emotion but also the cognitive content of the meaning of that emotion in its experiential context."¹⁷ Feelings are relational and so then is experience. Experience is the person in his environment, and feelings are the basic units of this experience. It was clear to me that there were implications here for religious feeling.

From some of Rogers' later writings, especially from "A Process Conception of Psychotherapy,"¹⁸ I began to realize the importance of viewing therapy as an experiential process. I became aware of the influence of Eugene Gendlin on Rogers' thought, appreciating very much Gendlin's thoroughly concrete

¹⁷ Rogers, "A Theory of Therapy, Personality, and Interpersonal Relationships, as Developed in the Client-Centered Framework," p. 198.

¹⁸ Carl R. Rogers, "A Process Conception of Psychotherapy," in On Becoming A Person, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 125-159.

and processive way of theorizing.¹⁹ I also recalled that Gordon Allport had said that "personality is less a finished product than a transitive process."²⁰ Previously, Andreas Angyal had observed: "It is not a question of a personal preference whether one studies a given phenomenon from a static or a dynamic point of view. The nature of the phenomenon in question determines the adequacy of a given approach..."²¹ With the influence of these thinkers, I began to seriously explore the possibilities of understanding religious experience as an ongoing process.

In working toward a process understanding of religious experience, the basic question that comes from my study of Rogers is: If an individual's religion is part of his experience, in what way is it, or can it be, part of personality change and growth? Gendlin's process approach to experience

19 For a description of Gendlin's theory of "experiencing" in relation to Rogers' "experience" see Eugene T. Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, Toronto, Free Press of Glencoe, 1962, p. 242-243; for the way that Gendlin furthers Rogers' thought see a letter of Gendlin, April 9, 1970, addressed to and quoted by Herbert Spiegelberg, Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1972, note 16, p. 154; for a good overview from a therapeutic point of view of Gendlin's contribution to the development of client-centered therapy see Joseph Hart, "The Development of Client-Centered Therapy," in New Directions in Client-Centered Therapy, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1970, p. 3-22.

20 Gordon W. Allport, Becoming, New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 1955, p. 19.

21 Andreas Angyal, Foundations For A Science of Personality, New York, Viking Compass, 1972, p. 50.

takes this question and turns it into the major concern of the thesis: In what way can religious experience be seen as an experiencing or feeling process?

Summary

As I review my interest in Marcel, Tillich, and Rogers, I can see how elements in their thinking are important for the process understanding of religious experience I am working toward in this thesis. Marcel helps me to focus on religion as a lived phenomenon which philosophical reflection is meant to elucidate. Tillich's thinking enables me to see that in approaching religious experience I cannot focus on "content" to the exclusion of the experiencing subject. Rogers' theory lets me realize that "experience" as he defines it is broad enough to include religious experience, and if religion can be seen in light of this "experience," then it is possible to speak of religion in relation to a process of growth.

2. Three Issues in the Psychology of Religion.

The thing I found most inviting in studying the psychology of religion was the chance to learn about religion as it is actually lived by people. I could focus on "religious experience," which was a central concept in the psychological understanding of religious phenomena. It did not

take me long, however, to realize that there were any number of definitions of "religious experience," each seeming to be the function of a given author's assumptions and methodology. I also found that religion as living in the person was rarely paid much attention. There was a "dry bones" quality to much of the literature on religious experience. Somehow the felt livingness that religion seemed to be--and that I wanted to study--was usually approached as if it were some inanimate specimen to be dissected.

As I started to seriously research a process understanding of religious experience, three interrelated issues I had been trying to sort out in the psychology of religion began to take on even greater importance. Before I describe these issues in some detail, let me briefly view their significance as they relate to religious experience as a process. The first issue, "Personal Experience Influencing the Methodology in Religious Experience," is interesting because the methodology a given author has for understanding religious experience seems dependent on what he understands religious experience to be, and this understanding of what religious experience seems to be is influenced by his own sense of religious experience. Since many writers on religious experience report having no sense of living religion themselves, I wondered if this fact might not explain why their methodology in religious experience fails to recognize it as a process.

I explore this issue by looking at the personal experiences and methodologies of James Leuba, an American psychologist of religion, and Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis.

The second issue, as I mentioned, is "The Subject-Object Dichotomy of Religious Experience." The heart of this issue lies in the fact that the concept "experience" is commonly understood as if there were an essential split between the subject experiencing and what is experienced.

"Experience" becomes a static, secondary phenomenon referring either to subjective feelings in the person or to an object experienced. When carried over to "religious experience" this static notion would make one think that methodologically one could either pay attention to subjective feelings in the person (for example, peace and happiness), or one could pay attention to an object God. The split in the notion of "experience" made a phenomenology of immediate, primary, and living communion with the divine impossible. In other words, this dichotomy reduced the actual process of religious experiencing into discreet, non-interacting subjective and objective elements. The thinking of Max Scheler illustrates how this dichotomy can be avoided in religious experience. Henry Nelson Wieman's thinking shows how the dichotomy comes about.

The third issue, "The Role of Feeling in Religious Experience," has always been significant in the psychology

of religion. It takes on added significance for a process understanding of religious experience because the notion of "feeling" as used by some important authors has arisen out of a need to speak about religion as a living process in the person. To close out this second section I highlight some aspects of "feeling" as a process which are to be found in two influential theologians, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto.

a) Personal Experience Influencing the
Methodology in Religious Experience.

Let me illustrate the issue of personal experience influencing the methodology one adopts in approaching religious experience through a brief look at James Leuba and Sigmund Freud and the interplay between their lack of personal experience of the divine and the methodology they employ to comprehend the meaning of religious experience. After we view this interplay, I will offer some conclusions I reached concerning methodology and phenomenology.

In a very forthright autobiographical article James Leuba talks of being raised in an atmosphere of "mitigated Calvinism" by parents who were regular church-goers.²² When looking back on his religious childhood, however, Leuba recalls that his own sense of religious experience was never

²² James H. Leuba, "The Making of a Psychologist of Religion," in Religion in Transition, Ed. by Vergilius Ferm, New York, Books For Libraries Press, 1969, p. 175.

very real. As he remarks:

The Ten Commandments gave me no trouble. I felt their value and accepted them wholeheartedly. But the creed and catechism appeared to me so strange, so remote from what I could understand, and practically so irrelevant or worse, that they left me reticent and chilled.²³

As he continued his studies, Leuba became conscious of a contradiction between the "unpractical" doctrines of the Church and the findings of the new science characterized by the thinking of Darwin. Leuba found himself faced with a choice between religion and science, and although he could support the moral ideals that religion proposed for the person, he decided that in the long run science offered the better hope of realizing these ideals.

In working toward the betterment of the person, Leuba allied himself with the psychology of his day, a functional psychology which he describes as "the adoption of the evolutionary, dynamic conception of mental life as opposed to the pre-Darwinian, static conception."²⁴ As a functional psychologist, he insisted that religious consciousness be open to investigation in the same way as any other psychological phenomena. He observed that "science does not come up against impassable limits any sooner when it occupies itself with

²³ Ibid., p. 176.

²⁴ James H. Leuba, A Psychological Study of Religion, New York, A.M.S. Press, 1969, p. 42.

religion than when it takes as its object any other phase of psychic life."²⁵ In line with this psychological focus, then, religion is understood as "a form of behavior or attitude, intended like all other forms of behavior and attitude to secure certain values."²⁶

Out of the psychological framework he adopted, Leuba arrived at a clear understanding of religious experience and God. Of the first he says:

Religion is that part of human experience in which man feels himself in relation with powers of psychic nature, especially personal powers, and makes use of them. In its active forms, it is a mode of behavior, aiming, in common with all human activities, at the gratification of needs, desires, and yearnings. It is, therefore, a part of the struggle for life.²⁷

Reflecting on God, Leuba's functional categories are even more pronounced:

God is not known, He is not understood; He is used--used a good deal and with an admirable disregard of logical consistency, sometimes as a meat purveyor, sometimes as moral support, sometimes as friend, sometimes as an object of love. If He proves himself useful, His right to remain in the service of man is vindicated.²⁸

25 Ibid., vii.

26 James H. Leuba, "The Task and Method of Psychology in Theology," in Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 12, No. 12, December 15, 1915, p. 467.

27 Leuba, A Psychological Study of Religion, p. 52.

28 James H. Leuba, "The Contents of Religious Consciousness," in The Monist, Vol. 11, No. 4, July 1901, p. 572. It should be noted in passing that William James was enought of a functionalist to borrow this quote for his Varieties; see William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, New York, Collier, 1961, p. 392.

Whatever the merits of Leuba's critique of religion, he has employed a functional methodology to interpret the meaning of religious experience while ignoring a more phenomenological description of what people actually seem to find in this experience. The important thing for him was not to get an understanding of what was there in religious experience, but to see what religious experience was for. It seems to me that the absence of a personal experience of religion influences the methodology he adopts for approaching the concept of "religious experience."

A second and more dramatic example which illustrates this same basic phenomenon is Freud's approach to "religious experience," an approach which reflects both his own experience and the psychoanalytic framework which he developed.

In the beginning of Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud mentions that Romain Rolland wrote to him describing, as Freud recounts it,

a peculiar feeling, which he himself is never without, which he finds confirmed by many others, and which he may suppose is present in millions of people. It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded--as it were, 'oceanic.'²⁹

A few lines later Freud states that such a feeling is alien to his own experience, when he says: "I cannot discover

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, Trans. by James Strachey, New York, Norton, 1961, p. 11.

this 'oceanic' feeling in myself."³⁰ Then he offers an articulation of this feeling in a way that he can understand it:

. . . it is a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole. I may remark that to me this seems something in the nature of an intellectual perception, which is not, it is true, without an accompanying feeling-tone, but only such as would be present with any other act of thought of equal range. From my own experience I could not convince myself of the primary nature of such a feeling. But this gives me no right to deny it does in fact occur in other people.³¹

It seems to me that having found no oceanic feeling in himself, even while allowing for its possible existence in others, what Freud concludes a few lines later should not be unexpected. Here he reasons:

The idea of men's receiving an intimation of their connection with the world around them through an immediate feeling which is from the outset directed to that purpose sounds so strange and fits so badly with the fabric of our psychology that one is justified in attempting to discover a psycho-analytic--that is, a genetic--explanation of such a feeling.³²

On the basis of his system of psychology Freud rejects both the immediacy of such a feeling and its actuality. It

30 Ibid., p. 12.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid. For a similar rejection of immediate religious experience in favor of its psychoanalytic interpretation see Sigmund Freud, "A Religious Experience," in Collected Papers, Vol. 5, Ed. by James Strachey, London, Hogarth, 1971, p. 243-246.

must be pointed out, however, that this discounting of the religious experience is really done on experiential grounds. Freud simply finds nothing in his own experience to make sense of Rolland's description, and so he must look outside this description for something to explain it to his own satisfaction.

From these examples in the work of Leuba and Freud, as well as from the examples of others writing in their own personal way, I began to draw some conclusions about personal experience that I knew I had to keep in mind if I wanted to adequately approach religious experience.

1. A writer's own sense of religious experience, or its lack, directly colours his formal approach to and description of religious experience.

2. A writer has the choice of taking as primary and foundational either immediate religious experience (another's or his own) or a particular psychological methodology.

3. Since any particular psychological methodology is ultimately rooted in experience, it is important to question whether in the elaboration of that methodology religious experience is included or not.

From these conclusions, and from the approaches of Leuba and Freud to religious experience, I derived the following corollaries:

1. A psychologist of religion who has no personal religious experience or who adopts a methodology which effectively precludes that kind of experience, tends to focus his attention on: a) the interpretation of religious experience in terms of experiential categories that are meaningful to him, and/or b) the validity of religious experience, again in terms that are meaningful to him or perhaps in terms that are acceptable to a given scientific community.³³

2. Such a psychologist of religion tends to reduce religious experience to an epiphenomenon or a reflected aspect of something else, rather than treat it in its immediacy.

3. Such a psychologist of religion is soon no longer focusing on religious experience as actually lived, but on the adequacy or limits of the methodology he has adopted.

Many of these conclusions were reinforced by my general reading in methodology and phenomenology. Peter Bertocci had said, for example, "We are not to presume we know what human nature is before we come to religious experience."³⁴ To do so, as Rudolf Otto asserted, is like "the

³³ For an insightful presentation of the importance of the scientific community in questions of validity see Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, New York, Harper & Row, 1964.

³⁴ Peter A. Bertocci, "Psychological Interpretations of Religious Experience," in Research on Religious Development, Ed. by Merton P. Strommen, New York, Hawthorn, 1971, p. 11.

attempt to frame a standard idea of the human body after having previously cut off the head."³⁵

From another perspective Adrian VanKaam had warned that it is quite easy for methodological criteria to become "nothing but concealed ways of stipulating and defining subject matter."³⁶ In addition, Erwin Goodenough had pointed out:

To appraise the great body of religious data will demand that one rethink much of psychology, as one would have to do if faced with any other large body of unconsidered data. The business of "psychology of religion" is not to fit religious experiences into pigeonholes of Freud or Jung or into the categories of Gestalt or stimulus-response or any other, but rather to see what the data of religious experiences themselves suggest.³⁷

In a variation on this same theme with an emphasis on the kind of methodology needed for focusing on living religion, A.C. Bouquet remarked with a telling analogy:

One thing is certain, we can never hope to understand the data of religious experience merely by studying religious psychology, any more than we can understand the meaning of a musician's composition by the mere study of the method of writing a score

35 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, Trans. by John W. Harvey, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 37, note 1.

36 Adrian vanKaam, Existential Foundations of Psychology, New York, Image Books, 1969, p. 92.

37 Erwin R. Goodenough, The Psychology of Religious Experience, New York, Basic Books, 1965, p. xi.

or of the construction or working of musical instruments, or even the technique of playing upon them.³⁸

From these reflections on methodology, reflections which reinforced my conclusions coming from the issue of a writer's personal experience influencing his methodology in religious experience, I became convinced that a phenomenological approach to the data is essential. I learned how necessary it is to focus on actual, or living, or immediately given religious experience, and I learned how necessary it is that whatever psychological methodology I might employ be able to help in this focus. The approach of Leuba and Freud to religious experience also made me aware of how important it is to see the subject experiencing in relation to what is experienced. In fact, failure to recognize the experiencing subject as part of the experience creates what I feel to be a second major obstacle in working toward a process understanding of religious experience. That obstacle is the subject-object dichotomy in religious experience.

b) The Subject-Object Dichotomy in Religious Experience

A second and far more complex issue that attracted my attention in the psychology of religion is what can be

³⁸ A.C. Bouquet, Religious Experience: Its Nature, Types and Validity, Second Edition, Revised, Cambridge, Heffer & Sons, 1968, p. 27.

called "the subject-object dichotomy in religious experience." This dichotomy, which surfaces in "religious experience" in a variety of ways, is basically attributable to the fact that the notion of "experience" is itself commonly understood as if there were an essential split between the subject experiencing, on the one side, and what is experienced, on the other. This split, which has its classic formulation in the Cartesian distinction between the res cogitans and the res extensa, allows "experience" to be understood as a subjective and/or an objective entity with little or no commerce between the two. As peculiarly nuanced in religion, this dichotomy allows "religious experience" to be taken either subjectively: certain feelings or emotions in the mind but with no necessary correspondence with reality; or objectively: dealing with certain religious objects apart from the way these objects are grasped, or perceived, or constituted. In other words, because of the subject-object dichotomy within the way "experience" is commonly understood, it is difficult, if not impossible, to focus on religious experience as it actually is experienced. If a given writer allies himself with either side of the dichotomy, "religious experience" is thereby defined either as "merely subjective" or as exclusively concerned, in one way or another, with an "object," God.

Since the subject-object dichotomy is almost implicit in the notion of "religious experience," it is helpful, first,

to view some of the thinking of Max Scheler, a phenomenologist who, for the most part at least, is able to avoid this dichotomy. Then, we sample some of Henry Nelson Wieman's thinking which shows how easily the dichotomy arises. But before we consider the thinking of these two writers let me offer some description of the way the subject-object dichotomy has insinuated itself within "experience." This description explains why the dichotomy is so pervasive in the understanding of "religious experience" and why it is so hard to see this experience as a living phenomenon.

As I tried to characterize the history of the subject-object dichotomy, I found that there was an "empirical paradigm" which over the last several centuries has woven itself into the actual fabric of experience. In this "empirical paradigm," which is in line with the thought of Locke and Hume, the objects of physical science or "sense objects" were so easily located, so stable, so amenable to quantification and experimentation, that the tendency was to prescind from these objects as experienced and to focus on their common "there-ness." In time, and with the perfection of the scientific method, the real became what was observed. The observer was either not taken into account, or when taken into account, was understood in objective terms as well.

To be sure, there were very good and practical reasons why an emphasis on objectivity arose in science. The

difficulty was that this emphasis easily turned into an exclusive methodological concern which, in effect, brought about a split between the subject experiencing and the object experienced. Robert Romanyshyn sums up well the way the "empirical paradigm" led to the subject-object dichotomy in science when in terms of "objectivity" he observes:

Objectivity was ... an attitude of openness which was essential for the development of science as a discipline separate and independent from religion and tradition. It assured the fact that the phenomenon being investigated would not be prejudiced by the beliefs of the observer. However, this historical meaning of objectivity, which worked so well in the development and rapid advancement of the physical sciences, eventually became a dogma in its own right. In the place of being an approach or method for empirical research, it became the approach which differentiated science from non-science. Ultimately, objectivity became an attitude which insisted on the separation between the observer and what he observed with the added implication that the observed constituted a world independent of the observer.³⁹

This subject-object dichotomy coming from an exclusive concern for objectivity in science exercised a definite and almost pervasive influence on the field of psychology--so much so, in fact, that Ludwig Binswanger calls it "the cancer of all psychology up to now."⁴⁰ It clearly surfaced, for

39 Robert D. Romanyshyn, "Method and Meaning in Psychology: The Method Has Been the Message," in Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, Vol. 2, No. 1, Fall 1971, p. 95.

40 Ludwig Binswanger, quoted by Rollo May in "The Origins and Significance of the Existential Movement in Psychology," in Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology, Ed. by Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1958, p. 11. For a good historical account of the subject-object dichotomy as it influenced psychology and the other social sciences see Floyd W. Matson, The Broken Image, New York, Anchor, 1966.

example, in the behaviourism of John Watson who tells us that the behavioural scientist has "dropped from his vocabulary all subjective terms such as sensation, perception, image, desire, purpose, and even thinking and emotion as they were subjectively defined."⁴¹ Psychology was construed as an objective science to the conscious exclusion of the experiencing subject.

The "empirical paradigm" with its attendant subject-object dichotomy was carried over into the psychology of religion. For "religious experience" it created a host of problems which, at heart, were questions of the phenomenon to be observed: What kind of "object" is given in religious experience? Is there an objective God given in the experience? Or is religious experience essentially certain feelings in the subject? Notice how the dichotomy is there so subtly in the notion of "religious experience" that questions on this experience in its primacy or immediacy are difficult to ask: What is the experience of God like? What is living religion? How can we speak of religion as a living process of relatedness encompassing the experiencer and what is given in the experience?

Let me illustrate the subject-object dichotomy in religious experience by first showing how Max Scheler consciously avoids it. Scheler does not speak of "religious experience"

⁴¹ John B. Watson, Behaviorism, New York, Norton, 1970, p. 6.

as a process, but his phenomenological methodology is a clear repudiation of the "empirical paradigm" in psychology, and it opens up at least the possibility of seeing religion in its livingness. Then, as we follow the progression of Wieman's thinking on "religious experience," we will see how the subject-object dichotomy arises as he shifts his methodological stance from phenomenological to empirical.

According to Max Scheler, modern psychology of religion originates in and essentially reflects the "spirit of positivism."⁴² Its rationale, which he completely rejects, is usually stated in the following way:

Whatever one thinks of religious truth, affirming or denying, whatever the religion to whose milieu one belongs, in any case religion is a collection of psychic phenomena and experiences, and as such is indubitably an object for psychology. The appropriate branch of psychology is called psychology of religion, and this psychology of religion is a science which can be practiced just as well by Christians as by Muslims, by atheists as by believers, etc., etc. It is thus entirely free of preconceptions and interconfessional.⁴³

Immediately Scheler goes on to say:

This argument is purely specious and of no account. No one who makes use of it can have clearly grasped the question of what the conditions are under which anything whatsoever becomes the object of psychological elucidation, and what the objective premises (or preconceptions) are from which every branch of explanatory psychology must operate.⁴⁴

⁴² Max Scheler, On the Eternal in Man, Trans. by Bernard Noble, London, SCM Press, 1960, p. 156.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

For Scheler, any argument is unacceptable which views religion as just a psychic phenomenon. "It is that," he says, "only on occasion when--and to the extent that--it rests on delusion and error, or is perhaps already seen as delusion."⁴⁵ In other words, Scheler is taking issue with an approach to religious experience which is concerned only with psychic states and cannot get beyond its own subjectivity. He feels that in the interest of psychological research religion has been emptied of its meaningful and intentional character.

In his basic understanding of psychology Scheler insists that it be concerned with the objective as well as the subjective. As he sees it, "explanatory psychology in all its branches, presupposes the reality of the objective field whose action and reaction on the psyche it is investigating."⁴⁶ As this principle is applied to religious experience, it is clear that "specific, real religious objects must be postulated before the attempt can be made to investigate their effect on the human psyche."⁴⁷

In his concern for methodology in the psychology of religion, Scheler makes a distinction between a "merely

45 Ibid., p. 157.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

descriptive" and an "explanatory" psychology--a distinction that might well apply to Freud's approach to religious experience. For Scheler, the descriptive approach in psychology of religion is only possible to those who believe in a religious reality. And the explanatory approach "can only be practiced from premises of unbelief."⁴⁸ The reasoning for this distinction is as follows:

The psychology of religion is confronted by this wholly peculiar situation, that the reality of the object whose reaction on the psyche it seeks to examine can only be received in the state of faith. Even the much-bruited 'empathy', by which one may enter the religious act of another, is no kind of substitute for the real performance of the act. For it is only the reality of the religious object and material, a reality experienced in real and genuine faith but necessarily wanting in the object of empathic faith, which can faithfully reproduce the psychic condition that is required for inspection.⁴⁹

Scheler's position is that real religious objects are given in religious experience, a position he makes clear in his unmasking of "two hidebound philosophical prejudices." The first prejudice he speaks against is the equation of primary data with sense experience. He insists that "nothing could be more disastrous for epistemology than to set up at the beginning of one's methodological procedure too narrowly exclusive a concept of 'experience'."⁵⁰ That which is given

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 159.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 158-159.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 255.

in experience is infinitely richer than the part of it which strictly corresponds to sense experience. The second prejudice lies in the "ignorance of the limits of provable knowledge."⁵¹ Since there are kinds of justification for what we hold other than those of empirical proof, we must take care to pursue that kind of justification which the situation demands.

In Scheler's "descriptive" approach to religious experience, what is significant is that he avoids the subject-object dichotomy. Religious experience is not "just a psychic phenomenon," and neither is it an object of sense data. At the same time, however, Scheler's phenomenology reveals that real "religious objects" are given in religious experience.

Curiously enough, while Wieman's main purpose in writing on religious experience is to develop a strictly empirical and scientific approach to it, there is in his early thought a line of reasoning about the "object" of religious experience that is remarkably close to Scheler's. Discussing in Religious Experience and Scientific Method the meaning of the term "God," Wieman observes:

If by God we mean the object of such experience, without any further attempt to describe his character, then there cannot be the slightest doubt in the world that God exists. For there can be no question about the reality of religious experience; and all experience is the experience of something. Religious

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 256.

experience is just as real as any experience, just as real, for instance, as the experience of a human beloved, or color, or sound, or the experience given in dreams and hallucinations, or those experiences which are said to be of trees and stones. All experiences are of equal reality. The only question that can be raised about them is about their precise character and significance. All experiences signify something. All experiences are experiences of some object or other. The only question is: What object? We often do not know the nature of the object we experience.⁵²

This passage, which is evidence of a clear phenomenological approach to the data, indicates that for Wieman religious experience is intentional and includes within it some rudimentary knowledge of a religious object. As he focuses on this religious object, however, his scientific concerns come to the fore, allowing him to say at one point: "We do not yet have any knowledge of God that can be called scientific. But for centuries our knowledge of the object of religious experience has been growing more scientific."⁵³ Later this shift from a phenomenological to an empirical approach seems complete when he says of God: "If He is not an object of sense experience, He cannot be scientifically known."⁵⁴

As the title of Wieman's book might indicate, two points of view are operative in Religious Experience and Scientific Method. One view--his chief purpose for writing

⁵² Henry Nelson Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method (1926), Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood, 1970, p. 29.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

the book--is that "religious experience is the experience of an object, however undefined, which is as truly external to the individual as is any tree or stone he may experience."⁵⁵ The other view, more experimental, is that it is fatal to religion to put the knowledge of God outside the field of scientific knowledge where it can be examined and tested. The question, of course, in light of the subject-object dichotomy, is whether Wieman can insist on the religious object as it is phenomenologically given and at the same time insist that this object be empirical as well.

In the Normative Psychology of Religion, which he co-authors, Wieman does not completely abandon his interest in the religious object, but now he sees it not as a given in experience but as an important issue to be discussed.⁵⁶

The reasons for its importance are these: first, refusal to treat the problem automatically represents religion as illusion and nothing more; and second, "religious behavior cannot be understood without knowing something of the reality, or the illusion, with which it is trying to deal."⁵⁷ In this latter book, in fact, psychology of religion is defined as

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁶ Henry Nelson Wieman and Regina Westcott-Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion (1935), Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood, 1971, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

"the study of the human behavior involved in religious living."⁵⁸ There is a major shift in focus from religious experience to behaviour, and within this shift the question of the scientific validity of religious belief arises.

Holding that religious belief must only be accepted on valid evidence, Wieman proposes seven alleged ways in which such belief can be validated: faith, revelation, authority, religious experience, pragmatic test, intuition, and observation combined with reason.⁵⁹ (Emphasis mine) It is this last way, "observation combined with reason," that he accepts as the only valid test of any belief. However, the description he offers of religious experience is especially interesting. In sharp contrast to what he had stated in Religious Experience and Scientific Method, Wieman now understands religious experience in exclusively subjective terms as "the feeling of peace and security" or "the jubilant feeling of having found a great and important truth."⁶⁰ Emotion, he says, must be distinguished from evidence, and the whole question of the object of religious experience is not even seriously raised.

58 Ibid., p. 35.

59 Ibid., p. 117.

60 Ibid., p. 119.

The progression of Wieman's thinking provides an excellent perspective on the subject-object dichotomy in religious experience. In his earlier phenomenological approach to religious experience, he was able, much like Scheler, to speak of the subject and the object together within religious experience. As his empirical concerns surfaced, he became very interested in making the object of religious experience a sense object. Then, with the influence of behaviourism, his concern for the object of religious experience gives way to a definition of religious experience in terms of subjective, non-evidential feelings and emotions. In other words, as Wieman's methodology shifts from phenomenological to empirical, the split arises between subject and object with the result that religious experience is defined first in terms of a sense object and then in terms of merely subjective feelings.

From my reflections on the contrasting methodologies of Scheler, Wieman, and others I became very aware of the many ways the "empirical paradigm" split religious experience into discreet, non-interacting subjective and objective elements. These reflections led me to draw the following conclusions:

1. It is important to take the object of religious experience seriously, simply because that object is given

(when it is given) in the experience.⁶¹

2. If the object or what is given in religious experience is not accepted--at least in some way--within that experience, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to accept it on any other grounds.⁶²

3. If religious experience is understood as merely subjective, that is, if it is understood apart from the object in that experience, what disappears is not the importance of the religious object (which still seems to specify the experience as religious), but rather any way of dealing with that object as actually experienced.

4. If religious experience is broken down into non-interacting subjective and objective parts, the living sense of the experience is lost. The subject-object dichotomy in religious experience makes impossible any understanding of religion as a living, ongoing process.

⁶¹ See Ninian Smart, The Philosophy of Religion, New York, Random House, 1970, p. 10; here Smart observes: "We should take the religious object or objects seriously, since to treat them otherwise may lead to distortion in the sociology, psychology and philosophy of religion."

⁶² It should be understood that by acceptance of the object of religious experience I am not speaking of anything other than what is given in the experience. Some call it a "real" object, others an "experiential" object. My own position is that the reality or validity of the sense of the divine within religious experience is an aspect of the experience.

In light of these conclusions, I formulated what I call the Hympty-Dumpty Principle, a principle more significant for psychology than for the physical sciences and one absolutely necessary for understanding religious experience as a living process. This principle states: once living experience falls into the subject-object dichotomy, that is, once living experience lies broken in non-interacting subjective and objective pieces, then there is no methodology that can put these pieces into a living whole again.

From the issue of the subject-object dichotomy I realized it is extremely important to take religious experience in the way that it is experienced. In understanding religious experience both the subject experiencing and the object experienced must be kept in relationship. At times I would want to focus more subjectively or more objectively, but it would make little sense either for the sake of convenience or out of deference to a particular scientific method to treat either the subjective or the objective aspect of religious experience as if it were some "thing" in its own right which could be understood apart from its analogue. In addition, I learned that, in effect, the subject-object dichotomy is really the cutting into static pieces of what is a primary and immediate living phenomenon; the dichotomy is the splitting of the living process that religious experience actually seems to be. I learned that in working toward

a process understanding of religious experience my method would have to be phenomenological in a way that can focus on living religion in its immediacy.

c) The Role of Feeling in Religious Experience.

A third major issue that became more clearly focused through my continuing study of religious experience as a living phenomenon was the role that "feeling" played in the description of this experience. While this "feeling" often appeared protean, non-rational, and very hard to define, still there were two very important religious thinkers, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto, who consciously and consistently relied on a concept of "feeling" to describe religion as something living in the individual.

Perhaps the most seminal writer on the role of feeling in religion was Friedrich Schleiermacher. He uses "feeling" in different ways to describe religion as an immediate, living reality. In his On Religion, a book whose aim is to evoke religious feeling in the "cultured despisers" of religion, he is concerned with turning the attention of the reader to his present feeling.⁶³ For Schleiermacher, living religion is to be found in feeling; it is not to be found in

⁶³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion, Third German Edition, Trans. by John Oman, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1958.

historical concepts or in a systematic religious philosophy for these are "only designations and descriptions of feeling."⁶⁴ The immediate, pre-conceptual nature of the feeling he wants the reader to pay attention to--a phenomenon remarkably similar to Gendlin's "experiencing"--is revealed when he says:

But I must direct you to your own selves. You must apprehend a living moment. You must know how to listen to yourselves before your own consciousness. At least you must be able to reconstruct from your consciousness your own state. What you are to notice is the rise of your consciousness and not to reflect upon something already there.⁶⁵

Schleiermacher further specifies the nature of feeling when, looking for the "place" of religion, he concludes:

When, therefore, we have asked where now among all it produces is religion chiefly to be sought, we have found only one right and consistent answer. Chiefly where the living contact of men with the world fashions itself as feeling. These feelings are the beautiful and sweet scented flowers of religion...⁶⁶ (Emphasis mine)

Speaking in relation to piety which he sees as the essential religious feeling, he asserts:

If the ideas and principles are not from reflection on a man's own feeling, they must be learned by rote and utterly void. Make sure of this, that no man is pious, however perfectly he understands these principles and conceptions, however much he believes he possesses them in clearest consciousness, who

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 41-42.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

cannot show that they have originated in himself and, being the outcome of his own feeling, are peculiar to himself.⁶⁷

In The Christian Faith Schleiermacher describes feeling in terms of an "immediate self-consciousness" which excludes the unconscious and yet is to be distinguished from mediated or knowing states. Within this "self-consciousness" he describes a felt relationship to God in terms of piety or the feeling of absolute dependence. As he phrases it:

The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety, by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the self-identical essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God.⁶⁸

While Schleiermacher was noted for his essential phenomenology of religion in terms of the feelings of piety or absolute dependence, of more interest to me was the way he had used "feeling" in trying to speak of religion as a living reality. In particular, I saw three characteristics of "feeling" in relation to religion as important to keep in mind in working toward a process understanding of religious experience. First, Schleiermacher had "feeling" marked out as an immediate self-consciousness of the individual in relation to his world, of which religion was an intimate

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, trans. from the Second German Edition by H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, Edinburgh, Clark, 1928, p. 12.

part. Second, he saw "feeling" as primary in relation to religious concepts and as essential for a personal understanding of them. Third, this "feeling" was a concrete part of the individual, and it could be addressed or evoked.

In some contrast to Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto in his Idea of the Holy sees feeling in religion as more objective and more unique.⁶⁹ His criticism of Schleiermacher is that "he sets out to teach a consciousness of the religious object only by way of an inference from the shadow it casts upon self-consciousness."⁷⁰

Otto speaks of the feeling of God in terms of the "holy" or the "numinous," a category peculiar to religion.⁷¹ This holy, which must be directly experienced to be understood, is "felt as objective and outside the self."⁷² It is a feeling or a feeling-response which is "perfectly sui generis and irreducible to any other, and therefore like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it

⁶⁹ Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 11. In a footnote, Otto observes: "... the feeling of a 'numinous' object objectively given, must be posited as a primary immediate datum of consciousness, and the 'feeling of dependence' is then a consequence, following closely upon it, viz. a depreciation of the subject in his own eyes. The latter presupposes the former."

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷² Ibid., p. 11.

admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined."⁷³ In addition to being the primary datum in religion, the feeling of the holy is essentially non-rational. As Otto says: "the feeling remains when the concept fails;"⁷⁴ concepts are "a mere ideogram of what is felt."⁷⁵ In fact, the failure to recognize the primacy of non-rational feeling in religion is seen by Otto as a basic weakness of organized Christianity:

So far from keeping the non-rational element in religion alive in the heart of religious experience, orthodox Christianity manifestly failed to recognize its value, and by this failure gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation.⁷⁶

While playing down the importance of its conceptual formulation, Otto does not want to say that the feeling of the numinous or the holy cannot be communicated. In the beginning of the Idea of the Holy, he states: "It will be our endeavor to suggest this unnamed Something to the reader as far as we may so that he may himself feel it."⁷⁷ He sees that the feeling of the holy cannot be simply taught, but

⁷³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid., "Foreword By the Author to the First English Edition," p. xxi.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

since the individual is a developing organism with "dispositions" toward spiritual growth, it can be evoked or awakened.⁷⁸ In part his description of the holy in terms mysterium tremendum, fascinans, and other related concepts are meant to do just this.

For Otto, the most direct means of transmitting the feeling of the numinous is by "living fellowship and the inspiration of personal contact."⁷⁹ He observes:

... in religion there is very much that can be taught--that is, handed down in concepts and passed on in school instruction. What is incapable of being so handed down is this numinous basis and background to religion, which can only be induced, incited and aroused. This is least of all possible by mere verbal phrase or external symbol; rather we must have recourse to the way all other moods and feelings are transmitted, to a penetrative imaginative sympathy with what passes in the other person's mind. More of the experience lives in reverent attitude and gesture, in tone and voice and demeanour, expressing its momentousness, and in the solemn devotional assembly of a congregation at prayer, than in all the phrases and negative nomenclature which we have found to designate it.⁸⁰

In this glimpse of some of the ways Otto understood "feeling" in religion, three points emerged as significant for a process understanding of religious experience. First, in his phenomenology of the holy he was saying quite clearly

78 Ibid., p. 115.

79 Ibid., p. 61.

80 Ibid., p. 60.

that there is an objective as well as a subjective aspect in religious feeling. The concepts that he used, for example, mysterium tremendum and fascinans, took into account both these aspects. Second, he saw, in much the same way as Schleiermacher, that "feeling" is primary in religion. It is something directly felt by the person which cannot be explained in terms of something else. This "feeling" is non-rational, and yet it underlies religious concepts. Third, he understood the individual as a developing organism with "dispositions" toward spiritual growth that can be awakened or evoked. He saw religious feeling as living bodily in the individual in such a way that it can be shared and developed interpersonally through a kind of empathetic interaction.

The one thing I found most corroborative from reading Schleiermacher and Otto in light of a process approach to religious experience was that in their phenomenological attention to religion as a living reality in the person they focused on the notion of "feeling." While they articulated the essential religious element of it in different ways, both were also defining it as a primary function of the person, as part of consciousness (even though non-rational), and as underlying religious concepts and systems. This "feeling" was not just emotion, nor did it appear to be exclusively subjective. For both of them--it can be argued at least--it had an intentional character. Finally, this

"feeling" could be addressed and evoked, shared and communicated.

Summary

A review of these three issues in the psychology of religion brings into sharper focus both the problems and the possibilities of working toward a process understanding of religious experience. The issue of "Personal Experience Influencing the Methodology in Religious Experience" reveals how important it is for a writer to take a phenomenological approach to his own religious feelings as part of his attempt to understand those feelings in others. If a writer's methodology is not in some sense phenomenological, if it does not pay attention to the immediate data of religious experience, then the method tends to take primacy over religious experience in a way that distorts the experience, especially in its livingness.

In the more difficult issue of "The Subject-Object Dichotomy in Religious Experience" the question of methodology arises again, this time in terms of the importance of approaching and describing religious experience as immediately given, that is, as not already separated into non-interacting subjective and objective elements. The subject-object dichotomy with its "empirical paradigm" offers not only a reductionist approach to religious experience rendering it

"merely subjective" or as concerned solely with an "object God," but it also shifts the focus on religious experience from a living process to static elements.

In the third issue, "The Role of Feeling in Religious Experience," the significance of "feeling" in religion surfaces and takes on definition. "Feeling" is primary in relation to religious concepts. It is conscious but non-rational. It is able to be addressed, evoked, and shared. Above all, "feeling" seems to describe religious experience in its livingness. Already we see the beginnings of what we will more carefully pursue in James and Gendlin, that is, a sense of "feeling" as a living, personal, religious process.

3. A Response through William James and Eugene Gendlin.

In light of the issues and questions of the previous sections, I find that three over-all considerations are crucial for working toward a process understanding of religious experience.

1. From my focus on religious experience in the psychology of religion as well as in philosophy, theology, and pastoral counseling, I realized that what is called for in each discipline is some kind of phenomenological approach to the data of that experience. I have to pay attention to the actual religious experiencing of people and let the description come as much as possible from that experiencing.

2. What is important is the living aspect of religious experience. Too often what gets focused on in a person's relating with the divine is a static intellectualization or a calcified slice of experience, which is then called religion. In other words, religion is too easily seen as content, that is, formulas, beliefs, or conceptual objects. Usually this content is not seen in relation to a person's ongoing process of living or his process of growth and development.

3. It seems that the term "feeling" arises almost inevitably in the thinking of every writer on living religious experience. It would be very profitable to focus carefully on "feeling" and specify its meaning as much as possible.

With these considerations--and all that had gone into them--in mind, I decided to explore in some depth the thinking of William James and Eugene Gendlin. Their thinking provides a response to the questions and issues I have raised while embodying, as well, any number of helpful resources for working toward a process understanding of religious experience.

a) William James, a Phenomenological Approach.

Why do I want to work with the thinking of William James and especially with The Varieties of Religious Experience? In reading James I could not help but be attracted by his openness to experience and his rare gift

for description. His writing is rich and profound in the way he sets his subject in bold relief yet without reducing, distorting, or carrying it to the height of abstraction.

At first I found James's attention in the Varieties to the more unusual instances of religious experience disconcerting. I gradually came to appreciate, however, that he is wrestling with an interplay in religious experience between reality and vagueness. He realizes that much of religious experience is not very clear. It is hard to articulate satisfactorily, so that even to the experiencer it can seem rather unreal. James describes the more unique kinds of religious experience precisely because they are not vague, because in them a sense of reality is more easily felt. His aim, then, is to focus clearly on the experience. As he observes: "By subtracting and toning down extravagances we may thereupon proceed to trace the boundaries of their legitimate sway."⁸¹

As I read in the Varieties, I also realized that functionalists, pragmatists, and experimentalists all claimed the author as a kindred spirit. But there is as well a phenomenological vein in the Varieties, a vein which I felt

⁸¹ James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 57.

to be deeper and worked with greater consistency.⁸² He offers not a phenomenology of religion but a phenomenology of religious experience.⁸³ His interest in the Varieties is, as he expresses it, "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men" as they stand in relation to the divine.⁸⁴ A major focus of James, as we will see, is on religion as a personal, living experience. He is critical of concepts and philosophies

82 For an excellent perspective on phenomenology in James's thinking as a whole see Hans Linschoten, On the Way Toward a Phenomenological Psychology: The Psychology of William James, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1968, and Bruce Wilshire, William James and Phenomenology: A Study of "The Principles of Psychology," Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1968. See also Ash Gobar, "The Phenomenology of William James," Proceedings of The American Philosophical Society, Vol. 114, No. 4, August 1970, p. 294-309.

83 See James M. Edie, "William James and The Phenomenology of Religious Experience," in Michael Novak, Ed., American Philosophy and the Future: Essays for a New Generation, New York, Scribner's, 1968, p. 250. Edie states in the beginning of this article: "The aim of this study is to investigate William James's contributions to the phenomenology of religious experience. To some it may appear strange that James "the pragmatist" should so forthrightly and without apologies be incorporated into the phenomenological viewpoint. But I want to show that James's methodological contributions to the study of religious experience are not only more sound phenomenologically than some of the studies which have, under the influence of Husserl, up to now explicitly invoked the phenomenological method, but that they are also the first to establish any solid basis for a true phenomenology of religious experience," p. 248. For an insightful explanation of what James's phenomenology of religious experience is like see Ronald M. Gilmore, "William James and Religious Language: Daughters of Earth, Sons of Heaven?" in Eglise et Théologie, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1973, p. 359-390.

84 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 42.

which can at best only give some indication of what actual religious experience is like. In the paragraph which originally was to open the Gifford Lectures he states:

Let me say then with frankness at the outset, that I believe that no so-called philosophy of religion can possibly begin to be an adequate translation of what goes on in the single private man, as he livingly expresses himself in religious faith and act.⁸⁵

With respect to methodology James proposes a science of religion which would "depend for its original material on facts of personal experience, and would have to square itself with personal experience through all its critical reconstructions."⁸⁶ As Gordon Allport noted in The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science, whereas Freud seems to use reported instances of experience as exemplifications of theories previously formed, there is in James much more of a tendency to let his categories suggest themselves out of the phenomena.⁸⁷ James is also quick to point out a basic difference in perspective between an outside observer and one who has the experience. To the extent he is an outside observer in religious matters, he respects the experience of others and tries to approach it on its own grounds. As he

⁸⁵ Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. I, Boston, Little, Brown, 1935, p. 259.

⁸⁶ James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 356.

⁸⁷ Gordon Allport, The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science, New York, Social Science Research Council, 1942, p. 10 and 7.

remarks: "The only sound plan, if we are ourselves outside the pale of such emotions, is to observe as well as we are able those who feel them, and to record faithfully what we observe."⁸⁸ In many ways, James's approach to religious experience can be characterized as phenomenological.

Although it can be questioned how successfully James avoids the subject-object dichotomy of experience, this problem is one he is conscious of in the Varieties. He points out, for example:

The world of our experience consists at all times of two parts, an objective and a subjective part, of which the former may be incalculably more extensive than the latter, and yet the latter can never be omitted or suppressed. The objective part is the sum total of whatsoever at any given time we may be thinking of, the subjective part is the inner "state" in which the thinking comes to pass.⁸⁹

Finally, there is in the Varieties a rather consistent focus on "feeling" as a description of living religion. This "feeling" James sees as the heart or foundation of religious experience, and although he speaks of it mainly in terms of contents, he also tries to explicate the process to which it seems related. It is to the way "feeling" functions for James at the heart of religion that much of our attention must be given.

⁸⁸ James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 260.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 386-387.

b) Eugene Gendlin, the Phenomenon of "Experiencing".

When I first came across several articles of Eugene Gendlin, I knew that what he was describing in his basic notion of "experiencing" or "feeling" was extremely valuable. At one and the same time this "experiencing" was a concept speaking of "experience" as a process and a concretely felt living phenomenon of the person which can be paid attention to. Moreover, "experiencing" was so basic and broad a notion that there seemed to be no reason why religious aspects could not be included. In short, Gendlin's notice of "experiencing" seemed to complement and further James's thinking on religious experience while also providing a clear way of articulating religious experience as a process of change and growth.

Gendlin's thinking offers a definite response to the issues that arise in the psychology of religion. He engages the problem of personal experience influencing methodology by developing a method which is simply a focusing on what is there in present personal feeling. He employs a phenomenology of "experiencing" or "feeling." All his descriptions are really an explication of different aspects of this "feeling" as a felt phenomenon of the person. Methodology comes from the "experiencing" itself and is essentially a way of focusing on, symbolizing, and furthering this process.

In paying direct attention to experience as a process of feeling, Gendlin consistently avoids the subject-object dichotomy. He finds that "feeling," as we directly focus on it, is subject-object. It is always concretely felt and always in relation to something. By "feeling" or "experiencing" Gendlin does not mean just the emotions. He means the felt sense of how I am in my situations. As he says, there is no internal/external split; we feel internally our living in the external situation."⁹⁰ In other words, Gendlin's very concrete phenomenology of "experiencing" as a personal process reveals that it is neither subjective nor objective but an interacting, a subject-in-environment process.

Although saying little on the role of "feeling" in religion, Gendlin's phenomenology of "feeling" or "experiencing" is so foundational as to include any kind or aspect of a person's experience, including the religious. His thinking allows us to focus on an actually felt phenomenon, namely, "religious experiencing," which is an aspect of the person's felt livingness. In other words, from Gendlin's thinking we have a "place to look," in Tillich's phrase, to work with religion as a process.

⁹⁰ Eugene T. Gendlin, "The Role of Knowledge in Practice," in The Counselor's Handbook, Ed. by Gail F. Farwell, Neal R. Gamsky, and Philippa Mathieu-Coughlan, New York, Intext Educational Publishers, 1974, p.284.

c) The Central Question of the Thesis..

We now have a context within which the central question of the thesis can be understood:

Can I draw on the phenomenology of religious feeling of William James and on the phenomenon of "feeling" or "experiencing" of Eugene Gendlin in order to describe and elaborate "religious feeling" or "religious experiencing" as a felt, living process of the person?

By the way I put this question I am saying that I want to draw from "feeling," as described religiously by James and therapeutically by Gendlin, in order to focus in a new way on "religious feeling." I want to define "religious feeling" or "religious experiencing" (the two terms are used interchangeably) as a living phenomenon, as an actual process of the person that can be worked with. I want to describe the basic characteristics of this living phenomenon and to elaborate some of its implications for growth and for a definition of what might be called "experiential religion."

Let us continue by looking at the phenomenology of "feeling" in James's understanding of religious experience and at the sense of process in his general notion of "feeling."

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF FEELING IN WILLIAM JAMES'S UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

This chapter is part exposition and part excavation. It is primarily concerned with the phenomenology of "feeling" in James's understanding of religious experience, and it is written with one eye on the questions, issues, and conclusions of the previous chapter and with the other eye on the process understanding of religious experience I am working toward.

I find that James's phenomenology of "feeling" offers us two things. First, it gives us a rather developed description of the role of "feeling" in religious experience, and second, it provides some initial ways of seeing "feeling" as a personal process of change and unification. Much like Schleiermacher and Otto, James was aware of how central "feeling" is in the articulation of religious experience as a living phenomenon. Long before the notion of "process" had any general acceptance in psychological thought, James realized that there is a definite connection between "feeling" and a change process within the person. Although hampered by a basically static notion of "feeling," at least in The Varieties of Religious Experience,¹ his need to approach

¹ William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, New York, Collier, 1961.

"feeling" as phenomenologically as possible produces insights into its nature as a process which are invaluable. His grapplings with "feeling" are the grapplings of a man with a genius for description. Much of what we will see of Gendlin's "experiencing" process in the next chapter can be viewed as a furthering of James's pioneering efforts.

In this chapter I am attending to three areas in the thinking of James. The first section of the chapter is concerned with James's own felt sense of religion. With the conclusions on Leuba's and Freud's methodologies in mind, I focus on James's own religious experience and the relation of this experience to the writing of the Varieties. If any writing on religion must reflect in some way the personal experience of the writer, then for an understanding of James it is important to see the kind and quality of religious experience that was his.

The second section of the chapter is concerned with James's phenomenology of religious experience as revealed in the Varieties--especially as this experience manifests itself as "feeling." First, by discussing some of its inherent characteristics, I discuss "feeling" in contrast to "conceptualization." Then, after briefly describing the religious object or referent of this feeling, I focus on James's description of the kinds of religious feelings that are a

response to the religious object. Finally, in this section I explore the process aspect of religious experience and feeling.

The third section of this chapter focuses on his thinking outside of the Varieties which offers an additional perspective on his notions of "experience" and "feeling"-- especially in relation to a living process. The chapter concludes with some critical reflections on James's approach to religious experience and feeling along with reflections on the significance of his thinking for a process understanding of religious experience.

1. The Personal Religious Experience of William James and the Writing of the Varieties.

In this section we look at James's personal religious experience and see how this experience enters into the writing of the Varieties. One of the things we will find is that James does have some religious feelings of his own. These feelings, which are not as strong or as pervasive in his life as he would want, are something he was trying to more fully comprehend as he prepared the Gifford Lectures.

a) James's Personal Religious Experience.

Perhaps the single most important influence on James is his father. In James's last letter to his father who lay dying, a letter written on December 14, 1882, he acknowledges his debt to him:

All my intellectual life I derive from you; and though we have often seemed at odds in the expression thereof, I'm sure there's a harmony somewhere, and that our strivings will combine. What my debt to you is goes beyond all my powers of estimating,-- so early, so penetrating and so constant has been the influence.²

There can be no doubt that this influence was pervasive in the area of religion. His father was deeply and wholeheartedly religious even though the form of this religion and its life in the family were unusual and hardly institutional. What James found significant was not the particulars of his father's belief, but the life in him of this belief. As he said in his introduction to his father's Literary Remains,

. . . the core and center of the thing in him was always interest and attitude, something realized at a stroke, and felt like a fire in his breast; and all attempts at articulate verbal formulation of it were makeshifts of a more or less desperately impotent kind.³

2 Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. I, Boston, Little, Brown, 1935, p. 130.

3 William James, "Introduction," in The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James, Ed. by William James, Boston, Osgood, 1885, p. 15-16.

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Ralph Barton Perry comments on the kind of influence his father exerted on James: "It was the spirit and attitude that won him, rather than the doctrine--his father's piety, not his father's ideas."⁴ While James could not adopt what were mainly the Swedenborgian tenets espoused by his father, the approach of his father to religion left some very definite traces in him. The broad outline of these traces is summed up well by Maurice Le Breton who observes:

. . . there is no denying that something of the elder James's abhorrence for ecclesiasticisms of any kind, his individualism, his general freedom from outward show of piety, his optimistic tendencies, his interest in mystical experiences and even his idea of a "working, everyday God" has passed into William's thought and reappears from time to time in the son's writings, though mixed with and in a way corrected by, later, foreign elements.⁵

One of the early accounts that reveals James's own sense of religion is in relation to a sustained period of depression he experienced as a young man. Writing in the guise of a French correspondent, James gives a long, vivid account of this experience in the Varieties, mentioning the role of religion in weathering the storm.

"Whilst in this state of philosophic pessimism and general depression of spirits about my prospects,

⁴ Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. I, p. 467.

⁵ Maurice Le Breton, The Religion of William James, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1926, p. 5.

I went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there; when suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse grey undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them enclosing his entire figure. He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. That shape am I, I felt, potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never felt since. It was like a revelation; and although the immediate feelings passed away, the experience has made me sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since. It gradually faded, but for months I was unable to go out into the dark alone."

"In general I dreaded to be left alone. I remember wondering how other people could live, how I myself had ever lived, so unconscious of that pit of insecurity beneath the surface of life. My mother in particular, a very cheerful person, seemed to me a perfect paradox in her unconsciousness of danger, which you may well believe I was very careful not to disturb by revelations of my own state of mind. I have always thought that this experience of melancholia of mine had a religious bearing."

On asking this correspondent to explain more fully what he meant by these last words, the answer he wrote was this:--

"I mean that the fear was so invasive and powerful that if I had not clung to scripture-texts like 'The eternal God is my refuge,' etc., 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden,' etc., 'I am the resurrection and the life,' etc., I think I should have grown really insane."⁶

It would appear from this description that at the time James had some elements of belief and some sense of dependence on a personal God. What brought James out of this long depression, however, was not so much a reliance on God as a decision he made, while influenced by the writings of Renouvier, to "voluntarily cultivate the feeling of moral freedom."⁷

Confirming the somewhat distant sense of religion suggested above and professing it as a basic attitude, James writes a few years later, in 1876:

My attitude toward religion is one of deference rather than adoption. I see its place; I feel that there are times when everything else was to fail and that, or nothing, remain; and yet I behave as if I must leave it untouched until such times come, and I am drawn to it by sheer stress of weather.⁸

In a letter to Thomas Davidson, January 8, 1882, there is evidence of an important shift from a sense of a

⁶ James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 138-139.

⁷ William James, "Diary 1868, N^{viii}" MS Box L, James Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁸ Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. II, Boston, Little, Brown, 1935, p. 353.

personal and sustaining God, slight though that was, to a sense of the need for God as an ideal for human life and activity. In writing to his friend, James remarks:

It is a curious thing, this matter of God! I can sympathize perfectly with the most rabid hater of him and the idea of him when I think of the use that has been made of him in history and philosophy as a starting-point, or premise for grounding deductions. But as an ideal to attain and make probable, I find myself less and less able to do without him.⁹

Nearly twenty years later, in some memoranda for the Gifford Lectures, the shift from a more passive sense of personal communion with God to a more engaging and activating sense of God as an ideal seems to be consolidated--even though there is an attendant sense of loss.

Life comes to me as expressive of result, as dramatically significant, as shot through with an ideality to which I am bound to be faithful. And yet I cannot find in myself a trace of personal religion in the sense, in which so many possess it, nor any live belief in a conscious spirit of the universe with whom I may hold communion. I used to have something like this, but it has gone, beyond the possibility of recall; and the difference is so distinct that it makes me realize how positive and definite a thing religion may be in one's life, especially at times of sickness or grave trial.¹⁰
(Emphasis mine)

⁹ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 737.

¹⁰ William James, "Another non-religious type," in "J. Memoranda for Gifford Lectures. Original Plan for a philosophical Second volume. 1900 plus," in Notebooks, MS Box L, James Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. From the way James reworks this passage, it is clear he is talking about himself.

It should be mentioned here that the "Gifford Lectures," also referred to as the "Edinburgh Lectures," were published as The Varieties of Religious Experience.

The clearest, most considered, and most nuanced position of James with regard to his own personal religious feeling is offered in a letter to James Leuba, April 17, 1904:

My personal position is simple. I have no living sense of commerce with God. I envy those who have, for I know the addition of such a sense would help me immensely. The Divine, for my active life, is limited to abstract concepts which, as ideals, interest and determine me, but do so but faintly, in comparison with what a feeling of God might effect, if I had one. It is largely a question of intensity, but differences of intensity may make one's whole center of energy shift. Now, although I am so devoid of Gottesbewusstsein in the directer and stronger sense, yet there is something in me which makes response when I hear utterances made from that lead by others. I recognize the deeper voice. Something tells me, "thither lies truth"--and I am sure it is not old theistic habits and prejudices of infancy. Those are Christian; and I have grown so out of Christianity that entanglement therewith on the part of a mystical utterance has to be abstracted from and overcome, before I can listen. Call this, if you like, my mystical germ. It is a very common germ. It creates the rank and file of believers.¹¹

The "mystical germ" that he mentions in his letter to Leuba raises the question of whether James actually had a mystical sense. In introducing the topic of mystical states in the Varieties he confesses: "... my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand."¹² Speaking of mysticism

¹¹ The Letters of William James, Vol. II, Ed. by Henry James, Boston, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920, p. 211.

¹² James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 299.

a few pages later, he avers: "To me the living sense of its reality only comes in the artificial mystic state of mind."¹³ Although for the most part James did not feel he was a mystic, clearly he was attracted to and intrigued by mystical consciousness.¹⁴ It was this attraction which led him to an experiment with nitrous oxide, in which he found the keynote of the experience to be "the tremendously exciting sense of an intense metaphysical illumination."¹⁵ Aside, however, from feeling he gained an insight into Hegelian philosophy, he did not seem that impressed by the over-all quality of the experience. On another occasion he tried peyote in order to expand consciousness, but this time the reward was only severe nausea.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁴ One of James's earlier reviews was a sympathetic reception of Anaesthetic Revelation by the mystic Benjamin Paul Blood; see Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 34, 1874, p. 627-629.

¹⁵ William James, "On Some Hegelisms," in Mind, Vol. 7, No. 26, April 1882, note, p. 206. It is interesting to mention in passing that Charles Tart says of James's description of the effects of nitrous oxide: "I do not know of any better account of the phenomenology of the nitrous oxide experience." See Charles T. Tart, Altered States of Consciousness, New York, Doubleday, 1972, p. 330.

¹⁶ Gerald Heard, "Can This Drug Enlarge Man's Mind?" in The Psychedelic Reader, Ed. by Gunther M. Weil, Ralph Metzner, and Timothy Leary, New York, Citadel, 1971, p. 9.

Perhaps the clearest account that James gives of a significant experience that could be characterized as expanded or mystical is in a letter written to his wife on July 9, 1898, in which he describes a night spent in the Adirondack Mountains:

The temperature was perfect either inside or outside the cabin, the moon rose and hung above the scene before midnight, leaving only a few of the larger stars visible, and I got into a state of spiritual alertness of the most vital description. The influences of Nature, the wholesomeness of the people round me, especially the good Pauline, the thought of you, dear Harry on the wave, the problem of the Edinburgh lectures, all fermented within me till it became a regular Walpurgis Nacht. I spent a good deal of it in the woods, where the streaming moonlight lit up things in a magical checkered play, and it seemed as if the Gods of all the nature-mythologies were holding an indescribable meeting in my breast with the moral Gods of the inner life. The two kinds of Gods have nothing in common--the Edinburgh lectures made quite a hitch ahead. The intense significance of some sort, of the whole scene, if one could only tell the significance; the intense inhuman remoteness of its inner life, and yet the intense appeal of it; its everlasting freshness and its immemorial antiquity and decay; its utter Americanism, and every sort of patriotic suggestiveness, and you, and my relation to you part and parcel of it all, and beaten up with it, so that memory and sensation all whirled inexplicably together; it was indeed worth coming for, and worth repeating year by year, if repetition could only procure what in its nature I suppose must be all unplanned for and unexpected. It was one of the happiest lonesome nights of my existence, and I understand now what a poet is. He is a person who can feel the immense complexity of influences that I have felt, and make some partial tracks in them for verbal statement. In point of fact, I can't find a single word for all that significance, and don't know what it was significant of, so there it remains, a mere boulder of impression. Doubtless in more ways than one, though,

things in the Edinburgh lectures will be traceable to it.¹⁷

The kind of intense, ineffable oneness described in this passage attests to the fact that James did have a mystical sense which, although more naturalistic than theistic, he himself saw as related in some way to religious experience. It is also true that those who knew James well credited him with more of a mystical consciousness than he credits himself. A colleague, George Santayana, calls him "a mystic, a mystic in love with life."¹⁸ Another friend and philosopher, John Boodin, writes of him at the time of his death:

Mystic he was to a very much greater extent than he gave himself credit for being, just because of his vivid sense of first hand values, of the living reality of the flow of life and its fluent transitions.¹⁹

These reflections of Santayana and Boodin, and especially the night in the Adirondacks, show in James a mystical sensitivity to nature and the rhythm of life which leaves him open and empathetic to the more specifically religious mysticism of others.

17 The Letters of William James, Vol. II, p. 76-77.

18 George Santayana, Character and Opinion in the United States, New York, Norton, 1967, p. 82.

19 John Elof Boodin, "William James as I Knew Him," II, in The Personalist, Vol. 23, No. 2, Summer 1942, p. 285.

b) The Writing of the Varieties.

Now that we have seen the way in which James approaches his own sense of religious and mystical experience, especially the concrete and experiential way he comes to articulate it and situate it in his life, we are in a good position to understand his vantage point as he approaches this kind of experience in the broader context of his Varieties of Religious Experience.

With respect to the religious influence of his father, James wrote to his wife on January 6, 1883, shortly after his father's death:

You have one new function hereafter, or rather not so much a new function as a new intellectualization of an old one: you must not leave me till I understand a little more of the value and meaning of religion in Father's sense, in the mental life and destiny of man. It is not the one thing needful as he said. But it is needful with the rest. My friends leave it altogether out. I as his son (if for no other reason) must help it to its rights in their eyes. And for that reason I must learn to interpret it aright as I have never done, and you must help me.²⁰

Many years later as he gathered and reflected on the data provided by friends and colleagues, James found himself basically receptive to it. He remarks in his notes of the time: "I, for one, reading all these autobiographies, do not

²⁰ Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James (Briefer Version), New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1964, p. 253.

feel free to deny authority of mystical experience of which they are so redolent. I cannot ignore all this unanimous tradition."²¹

When it came time to actually conceptualize his view of the nature and importance of religious experience, James writes to his long-time confidant, Frances Morse, revealing what are perhaps the two central themes of the Varieties. In a letter of April 12, 1900, he explains:

The problem I have set myself is a hard one: first, to defend (against the prejudices of my "class") "experience" against "philosophy" as being the real backbone of the world's religious life . . . , and second, to make the hearer or reader believe, what I myself invincibly believe, that, although the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function. A task well-nigh impossible, I fear, and in which I shall fail; but the attempt is my religious act.²²

The Varieties of Religious Experience was a personal and filial response to an area that James had found increasingly significant for living. While he did not put much belief in the teachings of religion, there can be no doubt of his belief in the significance of religion for life.

²¹ William James, "Theological School Lectures," in "H4. Religion After 1897." MS Box H, James Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

²² The Letters of William James, Vol. II, p. 127.

Summary

In summarizing the ways James describes his own religious experience, two general characteristics of these descriptions which are significant for the present thesis should be mentioned before the rest. The first characteristic is that James is offering in all these descriptions what he actually feels about God. He is describing his own immediate sense of the divine; he is not borrowing symbols from a religious tradition; nor is he offering an interpretation of the function or significance of God except as he directly experiences that function or significance in himself or in others. The second characteristic is that given within his immediate experience is a sense of the reality of the divine. God is felt by him as real, however dimly or vaguely.

The development or evolution of James's religious experience can be described as a shift from a vague feeling of security in the Scriptures and some sense of a personal God to a more consciously needed, yet equally vague, sense of God as ideal or as the aim and guarantee of personal striving. At times James suggests that the former sense is irrevocably lost, and yet at other times he seems more to express regret that this former sense is not readily accessible to him, not as intense or life-enhancing as it seems to be for others.

What mystical consciousness James has is also not that significant, not what he would call "exceptionally extensive."²³ He does have experiences, however, that are mystical in character, and although they are neither as intense nor as explicitly religious as he would prefer, they allow him some sympathetic admiration for the more pronounced and vitalizing religious experiences of others.

Perry sums up well James's own religious feeling in relation to his respect for the religious feeling of others, especially as this balance is achieved in the Varieties, when he says of James:

. . . he was interested in the justification of religion. His interest was never an external one, but was the interest of one who felt religion and was concerned for it. He wanted to save a place for his own generalized religious feelings, but above all, did he want to save a place for the more concrete beliefs of those more intensely pious fellow creatures with whom he sympathized.²⁴

Our attention must now be turned to a closer examination of religious feeling, especially as it is reflected in the theme of "experience" against "philosophy" in the Varieties.

²³ William James, "A Suggestion About Mysticism," in Collected Essays and Reviews, ed. by Ralph Barton Perry, New York, Russell & Russell, 1969, p. 501. In this article James tells of four quasi-mystical experiences; these occurred shortly before his death.

²⁴ Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, Vol. I, p. 165-166.

2. Phenomenology of Feeling in the Varieties.

This section of the chapter is an investigation into the definition and function of "feeling" in The Varieties of Religious Experience. First, the basic characteristics of "feeling" are seen as "feeling" is contrasted to "conceptualization" in religious experience. Next, the essential relation James finds between religious feeling and the experience of the divine is explored. Then, the religious response, that is, the way the person feels in relation to the divine, is considered. Finally, the relation in the Varieties of "feeling" to a process of change is viewed.

a) Characteristics of Feeling in Religious Experience.

The phenomenon that James consistently wanted to focus on in religion was the living, concrete reality as it was experienced. At the end of the original paragraph he wrote to begin the Gifford Lectures, he focuses on the living fullness of individual religion, contrasting this fullness with the inadequacy of concepts to capture it:

Religion is the very inner citadel of human life, and the pretension to translate adequately into spread-out conceptual terms a kind of experience in which intellect, feeling and will, all our consciousness and all our subconsciousness together melt in a kind of chemical fusion, would be particularly abhorrent. Let me say then with frankness at the outset, that I believe that no so-called philosophy of religion can possibly begin

to be an adequate translation of what goes on in the single private man, as he livingly expresses himself in religious faith and act.²⁵

What seems inherent in this focus on living religion and what gradually emerges as the Varieties unfolds is an understanding of "feeling" in contrast to the "conceptual" in religion. James describes this contrast in a number of ways. At one point he says: "I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue."²⁶ A few lines later he clarifies what he means by "secondary products" when he says: ". . . in a world in which no religious feeling had ever existed, I doubt whether any philosophic theology could ever have been framed."²⁷

Earlier in the Varieties, in the chapter on "The Reality of the Unseen," James described this contrast more in terms of dumb intuition and rationalism. He observes:

. . . if we look on man's whole mental life as it exists, on the life of men that lies in them apart from their learning and science, and that they inwardly and privately follow, we have to confess that the part of it which rationalism can give an account is relatively superficial. It is the part

²⁵ Perry, The Thought and Character of William James (Briefer Version), p. 259.

²⁶ James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 337.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 338.

that has the prestige undoubtedly, for it has the loquacity, it can challenge you for proofs, and chop logic, and put you down with words. But it will fail to convince or convert you all the same, if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions. If you have intuitions at all, they come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits.²⁸

James continues in this vein, contrasting now "subconscious life" and "consciousness," but following the same line of thought as he says: "Your whole subconscious life, your impulses, your faith, your needs, your divinations, have prepared the premises, of which your consciousness now feels the weight of the result."²⁹ A few lines later he reiterates what he has been saying, now contrasting feeling and reason and suggesting a working relationship between them:

The truth is that in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion. Then, indeed, our intuitions and our reason work together, and the great world-ruling systems, like that of the Buddhist or Catholic philosophy, may grow up.³⁰

Having given a nod, however, to their working relationship, James continues by stressing very clearly the primacy of feeling over the rational:

28 Ibid., p. 74.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., p. 75.

. . . our impulsive belief is here always what sets up the original body of truth, and our articulately verbalized philosophy is but its showy translation into formulas. The unreasoned and immediate assurance is the deep thing in us, the reasoned argument is but a surface exhibition. Instinct leads; intelligence does but follow. If a person feels the presence of a living God after the fashion shown by my quotations, your critical arguments, be they never so superior, will vainly set themselves to change his faith.³¹

Later, in his chapter on "Philosophy" James gives more attention to the positive role of the conceptual in relation to feeling in religion. He acknowledges that religious experience "spontaneously and inevitably" engenders "myths, superstitions, dogmas, creeds, and metaphysical theologies, and criticisms of one set of these by adherents of another."³² He points out that:

We are thinking beings, and we cannot exclude the intellect from participating in any of our functions. Even in soliloquizing with ourselves, we construe our feelings intellectually. Both our personal ideals and our religious and metaphysical experiences must be interpreted congruously with the kind of scenery which our thinking mind inhabits.³³

And furthermore:

. . . we must exchange our feelings with one another, and in doing so we have to speak, and to use general and abstract verbal formulas.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 339..

33 Ibid., p. 338.

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Conceptions and constructions are thus a necessary part of our religion.³⁴

Already more than sufficient examples have been cited to show that a contrast between "feeling" and the "conceptual" emerges from James's focus on living religion. And already the "feeling" described within this contrast is beginning to reveal certain very definite characteristics.

1. The Primacy of Feeling.

The first of four interrelated characteristics of feeling, a characteristic already alluded to, is that feeling is primal and foundational. Whatever conceptualizations take place, whatever philosophies or theologies develop, they are "secondary acquisitions," dependent upon the primary feeling for their very existence.³⁵ All intellectual operations are "interpretive and inductive operations, operations after the fact, consequent upon religious feeling, not coordinate with it, not independent of what it ascertains."³⁶

James describes religious feeling as "primitive and unreflective,"³⁷ and as "dumb,"³⁸ yet he sees these feelings,

34 Ibid., p. 339.

35 Ibid., p. 338.

36 Ibid., p. 339.

37 Ibid., p. 337.

38 Ibid., p. 338.

along with conduct, as the "essence" of religion and, in contrast to conceptualizations, as the "more constant elements."³⁹ Perhaps because he feels that this view is a bit disconcerting, he remarks almost apologetically at one point: "I do not say that it is better that the subconscious and the non-rational should thus hold primacy in the religious sphere. I confine myself to simply pointing out that they do so hold it as a matter of fact."⁴⁰

2. The Depth of Feeling.

Another way in which James articulates the primacy of feeling over conceptualization is in terms of "depth." He speaks of the conceptual level of religion as "superficial:"⁴¹ "The unreasoned and the immediate assurance is the deep thing in us, the reasoned argument is but a surface exhibition."⁴² And also, as we saw above, he asserts: "I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic

³⁹ Ibid., p. 390. James's "feeling" and "feelings" reflect more than single and plural usage. "Feeling" often seems to connote for him a deeper, non-rational, living reality of the individual. "Feelings" often seem to be surface manifestations and concept-like contents of "feeling."

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴² Ibid., p. 75.

and theological forumulas are secondary products. . . ."43

In speaking of the conversion experiences of Bunyan and Tolstoy, he describes something "welling up" in "the inner reaches of their consciousness."⁴⁴ James relies heavily, in fact, as we will see shortly, on the "subconscious" as a way of describing and explaining how the whole process of conversion or unification takes place.

3. Feeling as Fact and Reality.

Within the contrast of feeling to the conceptual, James often characterizes feeling as in some sense more immediately factual or real than the conceptual. He points out, for example:

Conceptual processes can class facts, define them, interpret them; but they do not produce them, nor can they reproduce their individuality. There is always a plus, a thisness, which feeling alone can answer for.⁴⁵

In discussing a possible science of religion James feels that as a science it must draw from "facts of personal experience."⁴⁶

43 Ibid., p. 337.

44 Ibid., p. 159.

45 Ibid., p. 354-355.

46 Ibid., p. 356.

What religion reports, you must remember, always purports to be a fact of experience: the divine is actually present, religion says, and between it and ourselves relations of give and take are actual. If definite perceptions of fact like this cannot stand upon their own feet, surely abstract reasoning cannot give them the support they are in need of.⁴⁷

In the "Conclusions" of the Varieties, in trying to avoid the subject-object dichotomy within experience, James refers again to the factual as he points out:

A conscious field plus its object as felt or thought of plus an attitude toward the object plus the sense of a self to whom the attitude belongs--such a concrete bit of personal experience may be a small bit, but it is a solid bit as long as it lasts; not hollow, not a mere abstract element of experience, such as the "object" is when taken all alone. It is a full fact, even though it be an insignificant fact; it is of the kind to which all realities whatsoever must belong; the motor currents of the world run through the like of it; it is on the line connecting real events with real events.⁴⁸

He continues, now explicitly in terms of feeling and its relation to concrete existence, as he says:

That unshakable feeling which each one of us has of the pinch of his individual destiny as he privately feels it rolling out on fortune's wheel may be disparaged for its egotism, may be sneered at as unscientific, but it is the one thing that fills up the measure of our concrete actuality, and any would-be existent that should lack such a feeling, or its analogue, would be a piece of reality only half made up.⁴⁹

47 Ibid., p. 354.

48 Ibid., p. 387.

49 Ibid.

Reality runs through feeling. To describe reality without taking account of feeling is "like offering a printed bill of fare as the equivalent for a solid meal."⁵⁰ Religion, says James, "makes no such blunder."⁵¹ A few paragraphs later, reminding the reader why he focused on the individual in religion, James returns again to "reality" in relation to the contrast between feeling and conceptualization:

You see now why I have been so individualistic throughout these lectures, and why I have seemed so bent on rehabilitating the element of feeling in religion and subordinating its intellectual part. Individuality is founded in feeling; and the recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, . . . Compared with this world of living individualized feelings, the world of generalized objects which the intellect contemplates is without solidity or life.⁵² (Emphasis mine)

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., p. 389. Before proceeding to the last characteristic of feeling to be considered, it should be noted that in the characteristic of feeling as fact and as real there is some apparent ambiguity to be recognized. James speaks, on the one hand, of feelings "as" fact or "as" real, while on the other hand, he speaks of feelings "of" fact or "of" the real. The former reveals a more subjective focus on feeling, what feeling is felt "as," while the latter is a more objective approach to feeling in the sense of focusing on the object or referent "of" that feeling.

4. Feeling as Truth and Knowledge.

While speaking of feelings of reality, James points out that they "are as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experience can be, and they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by mere logic ever are."⁵³ In fact, speaking in light of the contrast between feeling and conceptualization, he is willing to say of these feelings that

if you do have them, and have them at all strongly, the probability is that you cannot help regarding them as genuine perceptions of truth, as revelations of a kind of reality which no adverse argument, however unanswerable by you in words, can expel from your belief.⁵⁴

It is the "impulsive belief" which always sets up "the original body of truth."⁵⁵ And therefore, "the attempt to demonstrate by purely intellectual processes the truth of the deliverances of direct religious experience is absolutely hopeless."⁵⁶

Reflecting on the workings of the subconscious, James avers that the individual "absolutely knows" in a way "truer than any logic-chopping talk."⁵⁷ In describing those who

⁵³ Ibid., p. 73.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 355.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

have experienced self-surrender, he remarks: "They know; for they have actually felt the higher powers"58

Mystical states, which are similar to states of religious feeling, James also finds to be authoritative for those who report them; "they have been 'there' and know."59 He sees these mystical states as states of knowledge, explaining:

They are states of insight into the depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for aftertime."60

Finally, as a recapitulation of the characteristics of feeling in contrast to the conceptual we have James's reflection at the end of his chapter on "Philosophy":

Philosophy lives in words, but truth and fact well up into our lives in ways that exceed verbal formulation. There is in the living act of perception always something that glimmers and twinkles and will not be caught, and for which reflection comes too late. No one knows this as well as the philosopher. He must fire his volley of new vocables out of his conceptual shotgun, for his profession condemns him to this industry, but he secretly knows the hollowness and irrelevancy. His formulas are like stereoscopic or kinetoscopic photographs seen outside the instrument; they lack the depth, the motion, the vitality. In the religious sphere, in

58 Ibid., p. 102.

59 Ibid., p. 332.

60 Ibid., p. 300.

particular, belief that formulas are true can never wholly take the place of personal experience.⁶¹

b) Feeling and the Religious Referent.

Now that we have seen that for James "feeling" is the essence and the foundation of religion, we need to look at the objects or referents which characterize certain feelings as religious. In other words, what are feelings "of" that allow them to be spoken of as religious?

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 356. It should be noted here that the feeling-conceptualization distinction is not always understood by James in the same way. Originally the Varieties was to be in two parts, the first descriptive and the second philosophical. In what remains of this philosophical part, James's pragmatism comes into play as an inquiry into the question of the truth of what is revealed in religious feeling. In his "Conclusions," for example, James introduces a distinction between religious feelings as "only psychological phenomena" and the question of "the objective truth" of their content. (p. 394.)

It is in this instance, and in others as well, that James shifts his approach from experiential to empirical. Truth is no longer from within the experience, but it comes from some other (pragmatic) criteria, and there is a concomitant shift as well from the primacy of feeling over conceptualization to a primacy of conceptualization or interpretation over the concrete feeling. This is the empirical, pragmatic James, the James well known, no doubt, because of his later works: Pragmatism and four essays from The Meaning of Truth, New York, Meridian, 1955, and The Meaning of Truth, New York, Greenwood, 1968. I would contend, however, that in the Varieties this latter way of understanding the contrast between feeling and conceptualization is neither as pervasive nor as consistently relied on as the approach I have been presenting.

Perhaps the best statement of James's approach to the religious referent through feeling is in his now-famous definition of religion, a definition in which he asks the reader to see religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."⁶²

Wanting to understand this "divine" as broadly as possible, he indicates that it is "any object that is godlike, whether it be a concrete deity or not."⁶³ What is important is that the divine be seen in terms of felt reality; it is "a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely."⁶⁴ As James says:

It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call "something there," more deep and more general than any of the special and particular "senses" by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.⁶⁵

62 Ibid., p. 42.

63 Ibid., p. 45.

64 Ibid., p. 48.

65 Ibid., p. 62: This passage shows that James, in sharp contrast to Freud, is willing to allow the categories of empirical psychology to be challenged by a phenomenology of the unique way divine reality actually seems to be experienced. In light of James's phenomenological approach it is disconcerting to find Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, Trans. by John W. Harvey, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 10-11, note 1, pointing to this passage in criticizing James's "empiricist and pragmatist standpoint."

Most of the personal testimony James presents in the Varieties are accounts of experiences of a Christian God. In his running commentary between these accounts James himself most often uses the phrases: "sense of the divine," "unseen order," "sense of God's presence," and especially, "ideal power" or "higher power." He does not attach much importance to a further description or elaboration of what the higher power is. In fact, he contends that when we speak of the divine "we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn."⁶⁶

Things are more or less divine, states of mind are more or less religious, reactions are more or less total, but the boundaries are always misty, and it is everywhere a question of amount and degree. Nevertheless, at their extreme of development, there can never be any question as to what experiences are religious. The divinity of the object and the solemnity of the reaction are too well marked for doubt.⁶⁷

James perceives in much of the testimony he cites that there is within the immediate experiencing of the divine a correlation between the reality of the object and the intensity of the response:

We may lay it down as certain that in the distinctly religious sphere of experience, many persons (how many we cannot tell) possess the objects of

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

their belief, not in the form of mere conceptions which their intellect accepts as true, but rather in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended. As his sense of the real presence of these objects fluctuates, so the believer alternates between warmth and coldness in his faith.⁶⁸

But while there is a correlation between the sense of reality of the religious object and the feeling in response to that object, there does not seem to be a correlation between the reality of the object and the ability to specify what that object is.

The sentiment of reality can indeed attach itself so strongly to our object of belief that our whole life is polarized through and through, so to speak, by its sense of the existence of the things believed in, and yet that thing, for purposes of definite description, can hardly be said to be present to our minds at all.⁶⁹

It is significant that James's discussion of the "object of belief," or the "divine," or the "higher power" is from within experience. He is describing an experiential object, a referent revealed in feeling. He is describing a felt datum, and he is careful not to equate this with an object of sense data.

While it is true that this religious object may often be indefinite or conceptually vague, it is also true that at the same time it may be experienced as very real. Our feeling

68 Ibid., p. 67.

69 Ibid., p. 61.

response to the religious referent is, in fact, a function of its experienced reality. The description of this feeling response is our next consideration.

c) The Felt Religious Response.

Notwithstanding his insistence on the religious referent as being essential to religious feeling, James's real interest and focus is in terms of the feeling response or how religious feelings are felt. It is these feelings as felt and as flowing "from the sense of the divine" that he finds so attractive in themselves and so enhancing for life.⁷⁰

To begin with, for James there does not seem to be any one specific feeling characteristic of religion. Religious feeling depends on the individual experiencing and on what it is that he or she experiences. It may be a feeling of dependence, a feeling of the infinite, or feelings of love or joy or fear. James finds that:

As concrete states of mind, made up of a feeling plus a specific sort of object, religious emotions of course are psychic entities distinguishable from other concrete emotions, but there is no ground for assuming a simple abstract "religious emotion" to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself, present in every religious experience without exception.⁷¹

70 Ibid., p. 292.

71 Ibid., p. 40.

* Continuing this individual approach to religious feeling, he suggests:

As there thus seems to be no one elementary religious emotion, but only a common storehouse of emotions upon which religious objects may draw, so there might conceivably also prove to be no one specific and essential kind of religious object, and no one specific and essential kind of religious act.⁷²

After mentioning that there is no one essential religious feeling and after showing the connection between the religious referent and the kinds of feeling elicited by it, James goes on to say that the most common religious feeling is happiness or joy. He finds happiness to be characteristic of the "healthy-minded" person who "looks on all things and sees that they are good."⁷³ For this kind of person, his religion is from the outset "one of union with the divine" and his happiness is "congenital and irreclaimable."⁷⁴ For the "sick soul," as well, that is, for the person who must transcend the evil of the world, "the more complex ways of experiencing religion are new manners of producing happiness."⁷⁵ For this latter kind of person there is a "super-natural kind of happiness, when the first gift of natural

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., p. 85.

74 Ibid., p. 79.

75 Ibid., p. 78.

existence is unhappy, as it so often proves itself to be."⁷⁶

On the feeling of happiness as uniquely felt in religious experience, James quotes a German author, C. Hilty:

The near presence of God's spirit may be experienced in its reality--indeed only experienced. And the mark by which the spirit's existence and nearness are made irrefutably clear to those who have ever had the experience is the utterly incomparable feeling of happiness which is connected with the nearness, and which is therefore not only a possible and altogether proper feeling for us to have here below, but is the best and most indispensable proof of God's reality.⁷⁷

There are other religious feelings which James mentions as connected with the process of conversion: a sense of higher control which is often present;⁷⁸ a feeling of "assurance" and "joyous connection," which is immediate and intuitive and which brings with it a sense that "all is ultimately well with one;"⁷⁹ and a "sense of clear and beautiful newness within and without."⁸⁰

Similar feelings are mentioned by James as characteristic of the state of saintliness. For example, flowing from the sense of God's presence are feelings of safety, and of inner security and feelings of love for mankind.⁸¹ There are

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 199.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 201-202.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 203.

⁸¹ See the chapter, "Saintliness," ibid., p. 211-260.

also feelings of peace, tenderness, charity, resignation, fortitude and patience--all identified with the experience of union with the higher power, especially as saintliness mingles with the mystical in "reconciling, unifying states."⁸²

In addition, James describes "spiritual emotions" connected with saintliness, which include:

1. A feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests; and a conviction, not merely intellectual, but as it were sensible, of the existence of an Ideal Power. . . .
2. A sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life and a willing self-surrender to its control.
3. An immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down.
4. A shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards "yes, yes," and away from "no," where the claims of the non-ego are concerned.⁸³

All of these various feelings, which James is describing as a response to the divine, are described, as we have just seen, within the context of the process of conversion or as the end-state of a process of religious growth and development called saintliness. Just how James understands this process is our next consideration.

⁸² Ibid., p. 326.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 220-221.

d) Feeling, Conversion, and the Process of Unification.

The description of the felt religious response is really part of a description of the process of conversion and the process leading toward saintliness. Now we are in a position to look at the way James understands the process itself--especially the function of "feeling" within the process.

James speaks of the process of religious conversion as one species of a general psychological process of unification which is basically one of "remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord" in order to bring about "firmness, stability and equilibrium."⁸⁴ One way he describes this process is in terms of feeling. He adopts a kind of "from-to" model in which the individual starts from a state of melancholy or depression. This state is characterized by feelings of "mere passive joylessness and dreariness, discouragement, dejection, lack of taste and zest and spring."⁸⁵ The individual may feel "self-mistrust and self-despair"⁸⁶ as well as "self-contempt."⁸⁷ Often he has a "feeling of inward vile

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 127.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 136.

and wrong,"⁸⁸ or in the case of James himself, a sense of "panic fear" and a "grisly, blood-freezing heart-palsifying sensation" of evil.⁸⁹ For some individuals there is a "disenchantment with ordinary life"⁹⁰ or the "absence of permanent meaning."⁹¹ All this is the "from" in religious conversion.

What the individual comes "to" in this process are the feelings we saw in the previous section: a "rapturous sort of happiness,"⁹² a sense of "second birth,"⁹³ a feeling that natural evil is "swallowed up in supernatural good."⁹⁴ For some, there is the feeling that the self has "emerged into the smooth waters of inner unity and peace."⁹⁵ There is a sense of unification both inner and outer, a union within self and a union with God. In all this, says James, what is certain is that the process "brings a characteristic sort of relief; and never such extreme relief as when it is cast in the religious mold."⁹⁶

88 Ibid., p. 146.

89 Ibid., p. 139.

90 Ibid., p. 135.

91 Ibid., p. 124.

92 Ibid., p. 126.

93 Ibid., p. 135.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., p. 149.

96 Ibid., p. 150.

From another point of view, conversion and unification are described by James in terms of "a native hardness" or a rigidity of self which must "break down and liquefy."⁹⁷ This easing or flowing is most often achieved through self-surrender.

Give up the feeling of responsibility, let go your hold, resign the core of your destiny to higher powers, be genuinely indifferent as to what becomes of it all, and you will find not only that you gain a perfect inward belief, but often also, in addition, the particular goods you sincerely thought you were renouncing.⁹⁸

James feels, however, that there are some individuals who never are and perhaps never could be converted. He suggests by way of explanation that this kind of person is "frozen," and yet he says that even late in life "some thaw, some release may take place, . . . and the man's heart may soften and break into religious feeling."⁹⁹

It is the suggestion of a thermal analogy together with a spatial analogy in terms of a "field of consciousness" that goes to make up one major construct James uses to try to explain the process of conversion. He talks of a field of consciousness. Within this field there is a part or sub-field that "figures as focal and contains the excitement, and

97 Ibid., p. 101. .

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid., p. 171.

from which, as from a center, the aim seems to be taken."100

Talking of this part, we involuntarily apply words of perspective to distinguish it from the rest, words like "here," "this," "now," "mine," or "me"; and we ascribe to the other parts the positions "there," "then," "that," "his," or "thine," "it," "not me." But a "here" can change to a "there," and a "there" become a "here," and what was "mine" and what was "not mine" change their places.101

James goes on to explain:

What brings such changes about is the way in which emotional excitement alters. Things hot and vital to us to-day are cold to-morrow. It is as if seen from the hot parts of the field that the other parts appear to us, and from these hot parts personal desire and volition make their sallies. They are in short the centre of our dynamic energy, whereas the cold parts leave us indifferent and passive in proportion to their coldness.102

And then he takes this description of change in personality and applies it to religion:

. . . the focus of excitement and heat, the point of view from which the aim is taken, may come to lie permanently within a certain system; and then, if the change be a religious one, we call it a conversion, especially if it be by crisis, or sudden.103

"Just how the excitement shifts" and "why aims that were peripheral become at a certain moment central" can only be generally described by psychology; neither an outside

100 Ibid., p. 164.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p. 164-165.

103 Ibid., p. 165.

observer nor the person having the experience can fully explain it.¹⁰⁴ "All we know is that there are dead feelings, dead ideas, and cold beliefs, and there are hot and live ones, and when one grows hot and alive within us, everything has to re-crystalize about it."¹⁰⁵

In further description of the process of change James mentions that "the collection of ideas alters by subtraction or addition in the course of experience" and tendencies alter as the organism gets more aged."¹⁰⁶ New information plays "an accelerating part in the changes."¹⁰⁷ And "emotional occasions, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements."¹⁰⁸

As if he were still not satisfied with this explanation of change, James introduces what seems to be a second major construct to explain conversion and unification, a construct which centers around the subconscious as it breaks into consciousness. In contrasting the voluntary type of conversion to the way of self-surrender, he had already seen that this voluntary or conscious approach to conversion was

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., p. 165-166.

106 Ibid., p. 166.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

often insufficient to bring change about. This approach characteristically ended in "partial self-surrender" because "when the will had done its uttermost towards bringing one close to the complete unification aspired after, it seems that the very last step must be left to other forces and performed without the help of its activity."¹⁰⁹

To explain the "other forces" that must be relied on, James brings in the notion of the subconscious as an aspect of what is clearly an organismic process:

A man's conscious wit and will, so far as they strain towards the ideal, are aiming at something only dimly and inaccurately imagined. Yet all the while the forces of mere organic ripening within him are going on towards their own prefigured result, and his conscious strainings are letting loose subconscious allies behind the scenes, which in their way work towards rearrangement; and the rearrangement towards which all these deeper forces tend is pretty surely definite, and definitely different from what he consciously conceives and determines.¹¹⁰

Relying on the work of his former pupil, Edwin Starbuck, James feels that "to exercise the personal will is still to live in the region where the imperfect self is the thing most emphasized."¹¹¹ But "when, on the contrary, the subconscious forces take the lead, it is more probably the better self in posse which directs the operation."¹¹² The individual

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 174.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 175.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

seeking conversion "must fall back on the larger Power that makes for righteousness, which has been welling up in his own being, and let it finish in its own way the work it has begun."¹¹³

James is clearly intrigued by the process of change and conversion. His attempt to explain it is remarkably descriptive, and the role of "feeling" in this description is central. While obvious in the "from-to" model of change, "feeling" is there as the felt "hardness" which must "break down and liquefy."¹¹⁴ It is also there in the "frozen" person who "may soften and break into religious feeling."¹¹⁵ The notions of a "subfield" of consciousness and of a "sub-conscious" seem very close to the "feeling" he has previously described in contrast to the "conceptual." His view that the subconscious as it breaks into consciousness is a kind of organismic process has definite similarities to Gendlin's idea of "feeling" as an organismic process. In short, we see already in James many of the aspects of "feeling" as a process which will take on greater definition and utility in Gendlin's thinking.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

Summary

In focusing his attention on the living religious experience of the individual, James, much like Schleiermacher and Otto, found himself concerned with "feeling." This feeling has a position of primacy in relation to the secondary and dependent function of concepts. Although this feeling is non-rational, it is the deeper reality in religion; it is the actual fact, the existential core of religious experience. This feeling is what is felt as most real in religion, and within it there seems to be an immediate sense of both knowledge and truth.

Religious feeling for James is of an experiential object, be it the "divine," "God," or the "higher Power"; there is a feeling of "something there," a sense of the divine, which may or may not be a concrete deity. Although James sees the object or referent of religious feeling as conceptually vague and although he is not concerned with its description, he does see the experience of this object as real and as essential to religious experience.

The most interesting aspect of religious feeling for James is the felt response to the referent, which manifests itself in terms of happiness, peace, joy, newness of life, etc. These feelings, which arise out of the process of conversion or unification, are for him the life of religion

and its true significance.

James describes the actual process of religious conversion or unification in a "from-to" model with respect to feeling. The individual goes from feelings of depression, or despair, or lack of meaning to feelings of happiness, peace, and oneness with God. In trying to explain how this change process works, he seems to adopt two constructs. The first is in terms of a field of consciousness with a "hot" and shifting centre of interest. The second is in terms of a subconscious process which entails surrender to the "larger Power." In both explanations of the change process, "feeling" and similar notions are employed.

3. James's Thinking on Experience, Feeling, and
Process Other than in the Varieties.

As a way of further situating James's understanding of religious experience and as a way of throwing additional light on the role of "feeling" and the sense of process in the Varieties, we now briefly examine in his other writings some of James's thinking that is also inspired by a phenomenology of individual experience and feeling.

a) James's Understanding of the Primacy of Experience.

It is especially true for James that his understanding of experience influenced and was influenced by his understanding of religious experience. In fact, one reason why he was so interested in experience was that he wanted to do justice to all the various religious phenomena.¹¹⁶ He tried to achieve an immediate and broad understanding of experience and wanted to avoid reductionism simply because he found such an approach to experience inadequate. As he stated in A Pluralistic Universe, published a few years after the Varieties: "I think it may be asserted that there are religious experiences of a specific nature, not deducible by analogy or psychological reasoning from other sorts of experience."¹¹⁷

In focusing on any kind of experience, including the religious, James was interested in its immediacy, that is,

¹¹⁶ See Richard Stevens, James and Husserl: The Foundations of Meaning, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, p. 6. See also A.J. Ayer, The Origins of Pragmatism, London, Macmillan, 1968, p. 190, where he says of James: "... his desire to make room for his religious belief, without either relaxing his intellectual standards or manipulating the evidence, was one of the principle motives for his pragmatism. In particular, it strongly coloured his interpretation of the pragmatic theory of truth."

¹¹⁷ William James, A Pluralistic Universe in Essays in Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe, New York, Dutton, 1971, p. 264.

in the present living phenomenon before it is split by the subject-object dichotomy. In his article on "Experience" for Baldwin's dictionary, he reflects just such an understanding of experience by defining it as:

. . . the entire process of phenomena, of present data considered in their raw immediacy, before reflective thought has analyzed them into subjective and objective aspects or ingredients. It is the summum genus of which everything must have been a part before we can speak of it at all.¹¹⁸ (*Italics mine*)

In his Pragmatism James takes a similar view of the primal and processive character of experience. Speaking in a way that Marcel was to adopt later, he points out: "All 'homes' are in finite experience; finite experience as such is homeless. Nothing outside the flux secures the issue of it. It can hope salvation only from its own intrinsic promises and potencies."¹¹⁹ (*Italics mine*)

¹¹⁸ William James, "Experience," in Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, Vol. I, Ed. by James Mark Baldwin, New Edition with Corrections, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1957, p. 360-361.

¹¹⁹ William James, Pragmatism, p. 169. A case can be made that at the heart of pragmatism is a concern for concrete immediate experience--or at least that is the way James sees it. In The Meaning of Truth, speaking of how his pragmatic method was being received, he observes: "the main quarrel between us and our critics was that of concreteness versus abstractness." (p. 201). And shortly afterwards he talks of pragmatism as a concrete experiential process when he states: "The whole originality of pragmatism, the whole point of it, is its use of the concrete way of seeing. It begins with concreteness and returns and ends with it." (p. 216).

Still later, spelling out in his Essays in Radical Empiricism what is entailed in the metaphysics of "pure experience," he says:

Nothing shall be admitted as fact, it says, except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient; and for every feature of fact ever so experienced, a definite place must be found somewhere in the final system of reality. In other words: Everything real must be experientiable, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real.¹²⁰

James specifies his concept of "pure experience" in a way related to his definition of "experience" in Baldwin. Pure experience is what is immediately there or given in experience and is "only virtually or potentially either object or subject."¹²¹ As he describes it in its phenomenological immediacy, there is again a suggestion of process:

The instant field of the present is always experience in its "pure" state, plain, unqualified actuality, a simple that, as yet undifferentiated into thing and thought, and only virtually classifiable as objective fact or as someone's opinion about fact.¹²² (First italics mine)

From these few glimpses into how James understands "experience" before and after the Varieties, it is clear that

¹²⁰ William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism in Essays in Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe, New York, Dutton, 1971, p. 84.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹²² Ibid., p. 41.

he has an approach to experience broad enough to include religious experience and phenomenological enough to get at experience as a process. We have in James's "experience" the rudiments of what Gendlin develops in his notion of "experiencing."

b) A Phenomenology of Feeling and Its Relation to Conceptualization.

Additional perspective on James's understanding of the role of "feeling" in religion may be gained from seeing how "feeling" functions in other contexts. Since his use of "feeling" is not overly consistent, for our purposes we will concentrate on it as it either parallels the way he uses it in the Varieties or as it seems to be a process.

In The Principles of Psychology,¹²³ as we will presently see, James understands feeling within a feeling-conceptualization contrast, but he also offers there a more direct or concrete individual phenomenology of feeling. He observes, for example, that feelings.

. . . are exactly what we feel them, perfectly determinate conscious states. They may be faint and weak; they may be very vague cognizers of the same realities which other conscious states cognize and name exactly; they may be unconscious of much

¹²³ William James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. I and Vol. II, New York, Dover, 1950.

of the reality which the other states are conscious of. But that does not make them in themselves a whit dim or vague or unconscious.¹²⁴

Then, in a passage which anticipates Gendlin's concept of "experiencing," James offers a concrete example of what he means by "feeling," an example which suggests that it is conscious, continuous, and unfolding, and yet is not identical with conceptualization:

When I decide that I have, without knowing it, been for several weeks in love, I am simply giving a name to a state which previously I have not named, but which was fully conscious; and which, though it was a feeling towards the same person for whom I now have a much more inflamed feeling, and though it continuously led into the latter, and is similar enough to be called by the same name, is yet in no sense identical with the latter, and least of all in any 'unconscious' way.¹²⁵

James acknowledges the difficulty of discovering by direct introspection exactly what our feelings and their relations are. Often there is no word to name the present feeling and this "hinders the study of all but the very coarsest of them."¹²⁶ At times the present feeling does not outlast the act of naming it, but if it should, James thinks, "the state of feeling and the state of naming the feeling are

¹²⁴ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 174.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 195.

continuous, and the infallibility of such prompt introspective judgments is probably great."¹²⁷

In addition to this rather direct phenomenology of "feeling" evidenced in the Principles, there are four contrasting concepts that parallel and give perspective to the general "feeling to conceptual" contrast we saw in the Varieties. One perspective James adopts, a perspective which would tend to relate "feeling" and experience in its immediacy, lies in his distinction in the Principles between "knowledge of acquaintance" and "knowledge about." Knowledge of acquaintance stresses immediate experience as a starting point or as a prerequisite for knowledge; knowledge about is understood as a causal explanation of why things are what they are. Knowledge of acquaintance has primacy. For example, I am acquainted with the colour blue or the taste of a pear, but I cannot transmit knowledge about these things to someone who has not directly experienced these things himself.

I cannot describe them, make a blind man guess what blue is like, define to a child a syllogism, or tell to a philosopher in just what respect distance is just what it is, and differs from other forms of relation. At most, I can say to my friends, Go to certain places and act in certain ways, and these objects will probably come.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 190.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 221.

A second perspective taken in the Principles, which reflects the general relation of feeling to conceptualization, is a distinction James offers between "feeling" and "thought." "Through feeling we become acquainted with things, but only by our thought do we know about them. Feelings are the germ and starting point, thoughts the developed tree."¹²⁹ (Emphasis mine)

The suggestion here is not only that feeling is primary, but that it is also part of a process ending in conceptualization. The process, however, is not one of simple maturation, but is rather a kind of reworking. Feeling is what is inwardly had in consciousness; in thought, however, "we do more than merely have it; we seem as we think over its relations, to subject it to a sort of treatment and to operate upon it."¹³⁰

A third perspective, one somewhat close to the second, on the general relation of feeling to conceptualization lies in the distinction between the "transitive" and "substantive" parts in the stream of consciousness. From this perspective, while not neglecting the primal character of feeling, James's thinking suggests that it is part of a flow or process.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 222.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

In describing the mental process as one of change which may be slow or rapid, James observes:

When the rate is slow we are aware of the object of our thought in a comparatively restful and stable way. When rapid, we are aware of a passage, a relation, a transition from it, or between it and something else. As we take, in fact, a general view of the wonderful stream of our consciousness, what strikes us first is this different pace of its parts. Like a bird's life, it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings. The rhythm of language expresses this, where every thought is expressed in a sentence closed by a period. The resting-places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest.

Let us call the resting-places the 'substantive parts,' and the places of flight the 'transitive parts,' of the stream of thought.¹³¹

Although James feels that trying to catch hold of the transitive parts is "like seizing a spinning top to catch its motion," still he is unhappy with a failure to see the

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 243. It should be noted that James's use of the word "thought" is problematic. As his perspective changes, so does his terminology. What he is looking for in the Principles is a word that covers "every form of consciousness indiscriminately." (Vol. I, p. 224). At times he uses "thought" to define what he finds in experience, and at other times he uses "feeling." But he seems most comfortable with a use of "feeling" as describing immediate experience, and since he opposes feeling and thought (as in the second perspective mentioned above), very often the sense of what he is saying is only safeguarded by understanding "feeling" when the word "thought" is used. For example, it is more accurate to understand "Stream of Feeling" for the chapter in the Principles entitled "Stream of Thought."

feelings of relation, for example, supporting as an "unbroken stream" the substantive parts.¹³²

Speaking of the related "feeling of tendency" which is "a feeling of what thoughts are next to arise," James characterizes this feeling as a kind of supporting flow:

The traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonsful, quartsful, barrelsful, and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and the pots all actually standing in the stream, still between them the free water would continue to flow. It is just this free water of consciousness that psychologists resolutely overlook. Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead.¹³³

James continues, now connecting feeling with meaning and valuing in a way which, as we will see, is close to Gendlin's thinking:

The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it,--or rather that is fused into one with it and has become bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh; leaving it, it is true, an image of the same thing it was before, but making it an image of that thing newly taken and freshly understood.¹³⁴

A fourth perspective on the general relation of feeling to conceptualization is in the distinction James draws,

¹³² Ibid., p. 248.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 255.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

especially in Some Problems of Philosophy, between "perception" and "conception."¹³⁵ Here again, perception is the "primordial" thing; it is immediate and real:

The deeper features of reality are found only in perceptual experience. Here alone do we acquaint ourselves with continuity, or the immersion of one thing in another, here alone with self, with substance, with qualities, with activity in its various modes, with time, with cause, with change, with novelty, with tendency, with freedom.¹³⁶

In this distinction, as in the one before it, James mentions the element of change or process:

Conceptual knowledge is forever inadequate to the fulness of reality to be known. Reality consists of existential particulars as well as of essences and universals and class-names, and of existential particulars we become aware only in the perceptual flux. The flux can never be superseded.¹³⁷ (Emphasis mine)

In fact, it is the inability of concepts to change that makes James so impatient with them:

Conceptions form the one class of entities that cannot change. They can cease to be, altogether; or they can stay, as what they severally are; but there is for them no middle way. They form an essentially discontinuous system, and translate the process of our perceptual experience, which is naturally a flux, into a set of stagnant and petrified terms.¹³⁸ (Emphasis mine)

¹³⁵ William James, Some Problems of Philosophy, (1911) New York, Greenwood, 1968.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 78-79.

¹³⁸ James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. I, p. 467-468.

While most of what James has to say of conception is in terms of its inadequacy and its misuse by philosophers, he does allow that there can be a functional relationship between perception and conception.

Perception prompts our thought, and thought in turn enriches our perception. The more we see, the more we think; while the more we think, the more we see in our immediate experiences, and the greater grows the detail and the more significant the articulateness of our perception.¹³⁹

In fact, in terms of an ongoing process, James sees "perception" and "conception" as intimately interrelated. "Percepts and concepts interpenetrate and melt together, impregnate and fertilize each other. Neither, taken alone, knows reality in its completeness. We need them both, as we need both our legs to walk with."¹⁴⁰

Summary

From the way that James approaches "experience" in some of his writings other than the Varieties, it is evident that his sense of experience is in dialogue with his sense and understanding of religious experience. It can also be said that finding ways to grasp and articulate experience in its concreteness and immediacy is one of his major and

¹³⁹ James, Some Problems of Philosophy, p. 108-109.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 52-53.

life-long concerns. Furthermore, for the purposes of this thesis it is important to point out that the more immediate and concrete his phenomenology of experience, the more is experience described as a process or flux.

In the Principles, James pays attention to "feeling" in a direct, phenomenological way which brings out its character as conscious, continuous, and unfolding in some relationship with concepts. Oddly enough, this direct focus on "feeling" is close to what James practiced in describing his own religious experience, yet this directness is largely absent in his consideration of "feeling" in the Varieties.

"Feeling" in contrast to "conceptualization" also surfaces in four perspectives in the Principles, and in some of his other writings. In each of these contrasts the first or feeling element is primal or primordial, and in the last two contrasts this feeling is clearly seen as process or flow.

4. Critical Reflections.

In these reflections my purpose is to assess James's thinking on religious experience in light of his own concerns as well as in light of the contribution his thinking can make to a process understanding of religious experience.

To begin with, there can be little doubt that, among other things, James offers in the Varieties an approach that

is really an individual phenomenology of religious experience. He is presenting the descriptions of Fox and Bunyan, Augustine and Tolstoy, along with his own, categorizing as little as possible, and trying to use in an intelligible way the kinds of conceptualization that emerge from the religious testimony itself.

One major contribution James's phenomenology of religious experience makes in response to the central question of this thesis is his description of the way religion is rooted in "feeling." This feeling is defined descriptively as primal and foundational. Religious concepts and systems are dependent on it for their meaning, while religious feeling itself is seen as an irreducible and non-rational phenomenon. There is a depth to religious feeling, and intimately connected with it is a sense of facticity and reality. An immediate sense of knowledge and truth also seems to reside in it.

Another major contribution of James to a process understanding of religious experience is that he focused on the object of religious feeling as that object is revealed within feeling. Religious feeling is intentional for James; there is always a referent (God, the divine, the higher power) of religious feeling. In other words, religious feeling is a felt response to the divine. The commonly understood religious feelings (happiness, joy, oneness) which many

writers see as purely subjective, James sees as a feeling response to what the individual experiences as the divine.

A third major contribution of James to a process understanding of religious experience is that in the Varieties he shows religious feeling in relation to a process of conversion or unification. His thinking in this area suggests that the individual human person is an ongoing conscious-subconscious process which is capable of rather dramatic change as felt excitement and interest break into consciousness. James uses the term "unification" to describe the positive, growthful character of the end-state of this process. As we have seen, his own interest in religious feelings is because of the fact that they are so life-enhancing.¹⁴¹

Because the way that James understands feeling in religion is basically phenomenological, it offers a number of attractive characteristics. While he chooses to emphasize aspects of religious feeling which he finds especially significant, he does not distort this feeling or turn it into an explanatory construct. Even when he tries to explain how the process of conversion or unification takes place, he remains

¹⁴¹ These three major contributions of James will be clearly reflected in the basic description of "religious experiencing" to be offered in Chapter IV.

remarkably descriptive. An individual can feel the "hot places" in his field of consciousness; things do seem to rearrange themselves subconsciously and then pop into consciousness as changed. Each of us can realize that there is a felt foundation to our conceptual processes, an immediacy which, as experienced, seems real and true. The essence of religion is not in concepts but in an experience of the divine which is felt.

Since James roots religious feeling in the individual, he does not say what religious feeling must be. It is not necessarily an experience of the mysterium tremendum or of absolute dependence. It is simply the feeling had by any person in relation to what he experiences as the divine. In other words, religious feeling is just what is felt to be religious by any individual. It may be an objective entity, a higher power, an ideal, or a wider consciousness, and the feeling response may be happiness or fear or unity. Religious feeling does not have to be anything other than what it presently is, and it may change in the ongoing process of living.

The reason why James can focus on religious feeling as actually felt is that he does not have a definite or clearly articulated religious referent in mind. He does not start with the definition of a specific religious object and

then look for responses that seem to be appropriate in relation to it. Rather, his focus is on the referent and the response as these unfold together in the immediacy of experiencing within a given person. While he does want to talk about those kinds of religious experience which are of some religious object or referent, his primary concern is experiential rather than empirical or theological. Furthermore, James is able to see that often this religious referent is vague, that is, as experienced it is vague. Because of his commitment to the experiential, he is comfortable with vagueness and does not see it as meaning either not experienced or not real.

Although the thrust of James's thinking presented in this chapter is phenomenological, one major criticism I have of his thinking, at least in the Varieties, is that it is not phenomenological enough. His phenomenology slides back and forth on a scale that runs from a direct and concrete approach to religious feeling to an approach that is best described as distanced. In his own religious experience, as well as in some sections of the Principles, he could focus directly on feelings and let the proper articulation come from them, but in the Varieties he often abandons this approach. Perhaps because of his adoption of the feeling-conceptualization contrast, what he says of feeling and its primacy is often

said not because feeling is directly experienced as primary, but because conceptualization is always seen as inadequate. In other words, in the Varieties there is the sense that James is working from conceptualization back to the primary feeling that must underlie it rather than starting with feeling and seeing how conceptualization flows from it. His approach to religious feeling is somewhat distanced. While he clearly adopts a phenomenology of religious experience in the Varieties, if that phenomenology were furthered specified, it would be a phenomenology of the inadequacy of religious concepts and systems as much as a phenomenology of religious feeling.

Because of what I see as James's pre-occupation with conceptualization, he has in the Varieties, and even in most of the Principles, a very difficult time spelling out a working relation between feeling and concepts. He could say in the Varieties that feeling was "living" or "fact in the making," but that often seemed a deduction from "secondary" and "dependent" conceptualization. At least there is a sense that his approach in the Varieties is concept-to-feeling, and again, concept-to-feeling, with no consistent way to link them, no way to avoid a new exercise each time. If James had all the elements necessary for a process understanding of religious experience, he did not put them in running order.

As a result of his attention to conceptualization in the feeling-conceptualization contrast, the feeling that James wants to focus on is colored by the character of concepts, especially by the fact, which James often points out, that concepts are static and incapable of change. My second major criticism of James's approach to religious feeling, then, is that this feeling is largely static. While much of what he sees in religion is in terms of a process of change, he is not able to articulate this process very well. Religious feeling and the process of unification go together, but he can not say very well how they go together, even though in the earlier Principles he can offer a direct phenomenology of "feeling" and see from several perspectives that feeling actually is a maturational flux or stream.

The absence of a direct description of how feeling functions in the process of conversion or unification raises the question: Does all religious feeling enter into this process? At this point, the distanced phenomenology of feeling and its static understanding (as reflected, for example, in the "from-to" description of feelings in the process of unification), come together. James's hesitancy in the Varieties to directly describe feeling as an ongoing, organic process of the individual leaves him with no way of showing how feeling is an inherent aspect of the unification

process. As a result, he provides no intrinsic way of judging whether the religious feelings that an individual may report are part of his unification and growth or whether these feelings are signs of personal dis-unification or pathology. The question of how feeling enters into the growth process of the individual will be taken up in a section of Chapter IV on "Religious Experiencing and Growth."

Much of this criticism of James's approach to religious feeling is offered, of course, in light of the process of religious experience I want to describe. I would insist, however, that an understanding of "living religion," that is, religion as a feeling process of the individual which can end in the state of saintliness, is a consistent concern for him. He realizes that concepts stop the process, yet for the most part the solution he adopts is to use concepts to proclaim their own inadequacy and to point back to the process they are trying to capture.

In the thinking of Eugene Gendlin, however, there is a very direct and concrete phenomenology of "feeling" in the individual. Gendlin shows feeling and process as one phenomenon which is meant to be a growth process, and at the same time he offers a very insightful articulation of the intimate relation between feeling and concepts. A careful exposition of Gendlin's thinking will help to answer some questions

raised by James's phenomenology of feeling and will be extremely helpful as we continue working toward a process understanding of religious experience.

CHAPTER III

THE EXPERIENCING PROCESS OF EUGENE GENDLIN

This chapter builds on what James has been saying about the nature of "feeling" as a process by looking at the major elements of Eugene Gendlin's description of "experiencing." This "experiencing," as concept and phenomenon, has a very definite contribution to make to a process understanding of religious experience. On the one hand, it serves for us as a conceptual link between James's findings on the nature of religious feeling at the turn of the Century and a contemporary description of therapeutic change and growth. On the other hand, it is an actually felt phenomenon within which we will be able to find a description of how religion lives in the person.

Before we begin to look at Gendlin's "experiencing" or "feeling" from several different vantage points to see how it functions in the person, let me offer a brief description of it to give some idea of what we are about in this chapter.. One way to describe "experiencing" is to show how it arose for Gendlin as a way of understanding what takes place in the process of therapy. He found:

When therapists discuss cases, they use rough metaphoric terms to refer to a feeling process. They often say that they observe clients "emotionally absorbing something," or "working through," or "feeling through." The therapeutic process is

observed to include not only concepts, but also a feeling process. . . .¹

This feeling process is what Gendlin calls "experiencing." It is not just there with the concepts, but, as James also found, it seems to underlie them. If, for example, someone were to ask you, the reader, how you were feeling right now, you would have to stop and pay attention to your present "experiencing" and see what was there. And then you might search for the right words to say what that was. You might say "I'm a bit tired now." And then that might not seem just right, so maybe you would say "It's more like I'm distracted . . . there's an uncomfortableness . . . almost a sense of uneasiness." That might say pretty much what your present feeling is like, and you might experience a slight shift in yourself, as if your body were agreeing with your words. Then, if you stay with your present feeling, you might say with a sense of having really found what is there: "Ah! What I'm really feeling is I don't want to tackle this third chapter before dinner." The words that you use seem to come from the present feeling. Only the right words will do. The words are helpful because they point to, explicate, and further the process of "experiencing."

¹ Eugene T. Gendlin, "Experiencing: A Variable in the Process of Therapeutic Change," in The American Journal of Psychotherapy, Vol. 15, No. 2, April 1961, p. 237.

This presently felt, directly-referred-to, "experiencing" or "feeling" and the way that meaningful symbols or words come from it is the subject of Gendlin's research. "Experiencing" has special significance, as we will see, for the process of therapeutic change, but it is there in anyone as a felt "something" which can be paid attention to and symbolized or conceptualized. In this chapter we will look at "experiencing" from several different perspectives, each of which will have direct implications for the understanding of "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling" described in the next chapter.

A basic description of "experiencing" is offered in the first section of the chapter. We view it as a living, bodily phenomenon of the person, a phenomenon which is not just subjective but is really a felt interaction with the person's life situations. We see that, although preconceptual itself, "experiencing" guides the words and symbols we use to say what it is, and we find the proper words and symbols have the effect of explicating and carrying forward "experiencing" as a meaning process.

Relying on the theoretical description of the first section, we are able in the second section to view "experiencing" in the way it actually functions as a therapeutic and interpersonal process. We observe, with the help of some examples, how paying attention to "experiencing"--for which

Gendlin uses the term "focusing"--brings about a process of change in the person. We see that while "focusing" can be done by the person alone, often the response from another to a person's "experiencing" can be necessary and extremely helpful.

Some further characteristics of "experiencing" are highlighted in the third section of the chapter. These characteristics not only give a more complete picture of "experiencing" as a process, but they also are significant in the next chapter as we view religion from an experiential perspective. Critical reflections centering around the value of Gendlin's "experiencing" conclude the chapter.

1. A Basic Description of Experiencing.

- a) Experiencing, Existence, and Living.

Much of Gendlin's thought comes out of a creative interaction with existential philosophy and phenomenology. His theory of "experiencing" is really a theory of existence as lived. From an existential perspective experiencing is our concrete sense of being alive. It is what each of us as a concrete individual feels, lives, and experiences. "Existence," says Gendlin, "is always yours, mine, his. It is

the concrete ongoing living we feel and are."² He observes, in fact, that "it is doubtful that there is such a thing as 'you' apart from the flow of experiencing, which most truly is what you every moment are."³

This experiencing or living process is organismic. It is the bodily or visceral feel that each of us has of his own existence. "The sense of and access to existence is the life of the body as felt from inside, 'your sense of being your living body just now.'"⁴

What is meant by the experiencing process? It is felt. It is the most obvious thing in the world. It is our sense of being alive, our bodily sense, our feeling process. The experiencing process is your being here, now. It is you. You are now looking out through your eyes from it. You are a feeling process. You are not words or thoughts. I am not letting you think your own words. If you are following me you have my words now. My words are echoing in your head. But that does not make you be me. You are still here. You are not these words. You are a concrete experiential feeling process.⁵ (Emphasis mine)

² Eugene T. Gendlin, "Existentialism and Experiential Psychotherapy," in Existential Child Therapy: The Child's Discovery of Himself, Ed. by Clark Moustakas, New York, Basic Books, 1966, p. 227.

³ Eugene T. Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, Toronto, Free Press of Glencoe, 1962, p. 31.

⁴ Eugene T. Gendlin, "Experiential Psychotherapy," in Current Psychotherapies, Ed. by Raymond Corsini, Itasca, Illinois, Peacock, 1973, p. 322.

⁵ Eugene T. Gendlin, "Neurosis and Human Nature in the Experiential Method of Thought and Therapy," in Humanitas, Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 1967, p. 142.

For the most part "experiencing" and "feeling" are interchangeable for Gendlin, provided feeling is understood not as a noun but as a verb, as the feeling activity.⁶ Gendlin insists that "feeling is a concrete living process, a living-in-situations, not a container of picturable contents."⁷ This concrete living or experiencing is always there as how or what we feel. At any time we can directly refer to or attend to this present feeling. Gendlin uses the word "feeling" precisely because it refers to concrete existence as lived.

b) Experiencing as Situated and Interacting.

Although on occasion Gendlin uses the modifier "subjective" to help locate experiencing, his understanding of experiencing or feeling is no more subjective than that of James. As Gendlin explains:

What one feels at any moment is always interactional, it is a living in an infinite universe and in situations, a context of other people, of words, and signs, of physical surroundings, of events past,

6 Eugene T. Gendlin, John Beebe III, James Cassens, Marjorie Klein, and Mark Oberlander, "Focusing Ability in Psychotherapy, Personality, and Creativity," in Research in Psychotherapy, Vol. 3, Ed. by John M. Shlien, Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association, 1967, p. 219.

7 Eugene T. Gendlin, "Experiential Explication and Truth," in Journal of Existentialism, Vol. 6, No. 22, Winter 1965-66, p. 139.

present and future. Experiencing is not "subjective," but interactional, not intrapsychic, but interactional. It is not inside but inside-outside.⁸

In other words, experiencing is both concretely felt inwardly and situationally felt outwardly. A context of organism-environment is implicit in it.

A person is a bodily interaction with others and with his environment, much as breathing is a bodily interaction with an environment. How one lives and reacts is a bodily process going on in situations. When someone is about to jump at you, you feel it in your "gut." When someone is in complicated ways going to hurt you, again you feel it in your gut. Just as a golfer feels in his body, in the position of his feet, and in the muscular sense of his swing, the whole scene in front of him, so do we bodily experience the complexity of our situations and interactions.⁹

Experiencing or feeling, then, is how we live in our environment; "Feeling is how we are alive in the environment, and therefore we feel, in a bodily way, the whole context of our living."¹⁰ Take anger, for example:

We always feel angry at what someone did because of what happened to us and what we must now do. We never feel anger at just something subjective, an entity within, unrelated to the world we live in. What we actually experience eliminates the old barrier

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⁸ Gendlin, "Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 324. Also John Dewey, Experience and Nature, Second Edition, New York, Dover, 1958, p. 4a, makes this point when he says: "It is not experience which is experienced, but nature--stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways are experience; they are what is experienced."

⁹ Eugene T. Gendlin, "Focusing," in Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice, Vol. 6, No. 1, Winter 1969, p. 8.

¹⁰ Gendlin, "Experiential Explication and Truth," p. 135.

between the objective (geometrically conceived atoms and physical forces outside) and the subjective (entities or forces inside).¹¹

In his thinking Gendlin avoids the subject-object dichotomy because of his focus on feeling as situated and interacting. Feeling cannot be defined apart from environment; feeling is situated interaction. In terms of feeling, there is no subject within which is separate from objects outside. "There is no internal/external split; we feel internally our living in the external situation."¹² While language tends to dichotomize experience, feelings, when focused on directly, do not.

It is an error to think of situations as already cut up neatly and tritely, so that they need only be observed and stated, just as it is an error to think of feelings as featureless masses unrelated to situations or words. We have feelings in and of situations. Conversely, situations are not physical facts but predicaments for people's living, desiring and avoiding. Situation and experience cannot be separated¹³

¹¹ Gendlin, "Existentialism and Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 225.

¹² Eugene T. Gendlin, "The Role of Knowledge in Practice," in The Counselor's Handbook, Ed. by Gail F. Farwell, Neal R. Gamsky and Philippa Mathieu-Coughlan, New York, Intext Educational Publishers, 1974, p: 284.

¹³ Eugene T. Gendlin, "Experiential Phenomenology," in Phenomenology and the Social Sciences, Vol. 1, Ed. by Maurice Natanson, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 302.

c) Experiencing as Preconceptual and as Guiding Conceptualization.

Having described experiencing as living and situated, Gendlin points to the fact that this process is also pre-conceptual and, in fact, endlessly differentiable. In a way redolent of James, he observes:

One exists one's concrete experiencing and this is not equal to concepts, conceptual patterns, definitions, or units of any kind. Patterns and units can be made from experiencing, but experiencing is never equal to what words we say, or to any "what," which one might define.¹⁴

Gendlin explains further what he means when he says:

By "preconceptual" is meant that this differentiability of experience can occur in many ways which are not logically or conceptually determined. If experiencing were conceptual, or even logically determined, then if divided in some one way, all further ways it could be divided would have to be consistent with the first way. Only those further aspects could occur which would logically fit with the first. In fact, experiencing is preconceptual and can be differentiated into very many sub-aspects, all then directly felt, more than any conceptual scheme can handle.¹⁵

Like James, Gendlin is positing a primacy of experiencing or feeling over conceptualization. "The experiences are not defined by the concepts, but, on the contrary, the concepts are defined by the steps of experiencing."¹⁶ Often

¹⁴ Gendlin, "Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 322.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 323.

¹⁶ Gendlin, "Existentialism and Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 209..

this primal experiencing is vague in the sense that it cannot easily be named or differentiated conceptually, and yet it is not at all vague in its being there. As he says of present feeling,

It may be vague only in that we may not know what it is. We can put only a few aspects of it into words. The mass itself is always something there, no matter what we say "it is." Our definitions, our knowing "what it is," are symbols that specify aspects of it, "parts" of it, as we say. Whether we name it, divide it, or not, there it is.¹⁷

For Gendlin, not only is there a primacy of feeling, but, as in the thought of James, there is as well a cognitive element in feeling which he calls "implicit meaning." Feeling or experiencing is implicitly meaningful. There is a kind of meaning in feeling, although this meaning is only implicitly felt and not, perhaps, differentiated explicitly in words or symbols. He explains:

Here is something we call a "feeling," something felt in a physical sense, yet later on the individual will say that certain concepts now accurately represent that feeling. The feeling, he will say, was such and so all along, but he didn't know it. He only felt it. He felt it in such a unique and specific way that he could gradually, by directly referring to it, arrive at concepts for it. That is to say, the

¹⁷ Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, p. 11. The words "symbol" and "symbolize" have a very precise meaning for Gendlin. A "symbol" is anything that directly interacts with or "fits" experiencing. Most often we use conceptualization as a way of symbolizing or making explicit what is presently being experienced, but this might also be done through a gesture, an image, an action, or an event--through whatever is able to capture present experiencing or feeling.

feeling was implicitly meaningful. It had a meaning which was distinguishably different from other feelings and meanings, but its meaning was felt rather than known in explicit symbols.¹⁸

Experiencing or feeling is of meanings which are preconceptual in themselves, but which must be looked to as the basis of conceptualization.

Experiencing guides conceptualization; it is in a sense primary in that some explicit meanings may "fit" it and some may not. To find the right meaning the person may often have to refer back to his present experiencing to see what its explicit meaning is. Often there are many more meanings in present, concrete experiencing than could be made explicit, and also this present ongoing experiencing could be conceptualized in many different ways.¹⁹ (Emphasis mine)

Like James, then, Gendlin sees truth in feeling in the sense that, when the right words come, we know if they are true. We can feel the truth, even though the words themselves are a "running truth" and may need to change as experiencing is ongoing.²⁰

¹⁸ Gendlin, "Experiencing: A Variable in the Process of Therapeutic Change," p. 237.

¹⁹ Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, p. 46.

²⁰ Gendlin, "Neurosis and Human Nature in the Experiential Method of Thought and Therapy," p. 147. For a further look at Gendlin's understanding of "truth," especially as it is in process, see "Experiential Explication and Truth."

d) Experiencing as Explicated Conceptually
or Symbolically.

As we have seen, experiencing is preconceptual, yet it guides conceptualization. The tendency, therefore, a tendency which James seemed to follow, is to see feeling as essentially the same as concepts, only non-verbal. But Gendlin insists that experiencing is not made up of hidden conceptual units.²¹

I must now make it quite clear that "implicit" and "explicit" meanings are different in nature. We may feel that some verbal statement says exactly what we mean; nevertheless, to feel the meaning is not the same kind of thing as verbal symbols. As we have shown, a felt meaning can contain very many meanings and can be further and further elaborated. Thus the felt meaning is not the same in kind as the precise symbolized explicit meaning. The reason the difference in kind is so important is because if we ignore it we assume that explicit meanings are (or were) already in the implicit felt meaning. We are led to make the felt, implicit meaning a kind of dark place in which countless explicit meanings are hidden. We then wrongly assume that these meanings are "implicit" and felt only in that they are "hidden." I must emphasize that the "implicit" or "felt" datum of experiencing is a sensing of body life. As such it may have countless organized aspects, but this does not mean that they are conceptually formed, explicit, and hidden. Rather, we complete and form them when we explicate.²²

Gendlin found that experiencing is different in "kind" from conceptualization, and yet it needs symbols to point to

²¹ Eugene T. Gendlin, "A Theory of Personality Change," in New Directions in Client-Centered Therapy, Ed. by J.T. Hart and T.M. Tomlinson, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1970, p. 141.

²² Ibid., p. 140.

it and form it. It needs a word, or image, or action, or event, or interpersonal response-- anything which can refer to the present experiencing and capture or complete it. Furthermore, this completion is itself felt. When words or symbols or events "fit" the present experiencing, there is an experiential effect and a felt shift or release is experienced.²³

When we differentiate and symbolize a felt meaning by using words (just those words which, at the moment, feel exactly right), a physical felt change or 'referent movement' occurs, indicating that one alters the felt meaning by accurately symbolizing it.²⁴

One of the most significant findings of Gendlin is not only that there is a relationship of interdependence between feeling and symbolization, but that that relationship is also an ongoing interacting. Experiencing as an ongoing process is also an interacting with words or symbols, and specifically with those words or symbols which complete it and, in so doing, change it or carry the experiencing further.

When an individual expresses accurately for the first time how he is, just then and in precisely in so doing he is no longer that way. The accuracy which he feels so deeply--the physically sensed release of the words which feel exactly right--this very feeling is the feeling of change, or resolution, of experiencing moving a step forward.²⁵

²³ Gendlin, "Focusing," p. 5.

²⁴ Eugene T. Gendlin, "Values and the Process of Experiencing," in The Goals of Psychotherapy, Ed. by Alvin R. Mahrer, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967, p. 189.

²⁵ Gendlin, "Existentialism and Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 236.

In discussing the interaction between experiencing and symbols or concepts, we are already beginning to describe the process of therapeutic change. Before we move to a description, in the next section, of how therapeutic change occurs, let us look a little more closely at concepts and their function.

Experiential Concepts

So far we have seen the interrelation between experiencing and symbols, noting the role that symbols and concepts can have in interacting with, explicating, and changing experiencing. At this point we can look more directly at the function of concepts as Gendlin describes that function.

Every concept has a logical and a felt aspect, although even the logical aspect must at some time have been in relation to experiencing. Gendlin explains:

What really is a concept? A concept is both logical and felt. It is a logical construct but since it is also a thought, it has a "soft underbelly," it is made of felt sensing. We "know what it means" or "what we mean by using it" . . . we know what we mean with it in a felt sensing way. We mean with the concept to make a certain point, to take exception to an aspect of what has been said, to point out certain things which are important because . . . and so on (again the chain of many many implicit facets, as with any felt sense, so with felt sense of a concept in use).²⁶

²⁶ Eugene T. Gendlin, "The Discovery of Felt Meaning," in Language and Meaning, Ed. by James B. Macdonald and Robert R. Leeper, Washington, D.C., National Education Association, 1966, p. 47.

Gendlin stresses the rootedness of the concept in the felt sensing or felt meaning of experiencing when he points out:

We cannot even know what a concept "means" or use it meaningfully without the "feel" of its meaning. No amount of symbols, definitions, and the like can be used in the place of felt meaning. If we do not have the felt meaning of the concept, we haven't got the concept at all--only a verbal noise.²⁷

For a concept, as Gendlin defines it, two things are necessary: experiencing or felt meaning and the verbal symbol. In fact, the real definition of the concept from this experiential perspective is that it is the relation between the two.

Concepts are relationships between felt meanings and linguistic symbols. The linguistic symbols are really only noises or sound images of noises--except in so far as they relate to felt meanings. Only as we have the felt meaning, do we have the meaning of a concept. Only with the felt meanings of concepts do we think. It is thus the very nature of concepts, that they consist not only of noises but also of felt meanings.²⁸

As we will see in the next section, one of Gendlin's major discoveries is that in therapy the logical use of concepts does not bring about change. "One can, and often does, move directly from concept to concept by conceptual implication.

27 Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, p. 5-6.

28 Eugene T. Gendlin, "Experiencing and the Nature of Concepts," in The Christian Scholar, Vol. 46, No. 3, Fall 1963, p. 251-252.

But therapeutic change and resolution occur because of those times when one moves via intervening experiential steps."²⁹ Only an experiential use of concepts, only the use of words or of symbols which directly refer to or interact with concrete experiencing have a therapeutic effect on the individual. As Gendlin says: "All psychotherapists and psychotherapy patients know the difference between statements that are merely true and--much rarer--statements which make an experiential difference."³⁰

Although in the context of therapy concepts are used by the therapist which have explanatory meaning, usually these concepts do ~~not~~ touch the client's concrete experiencing.

These concepts do not tell us the underlying dynamics. Concretely felt experiential meanings really "underlie." Concepts have real meaning only as they are made to refer to some of these specific and firmly differentiated aspects of felt meanings. In so using concepts, the meaning resides in the felt meanings one concretely refers to. The concept is a pointer. Concepts have only a poor, nearly empty general meaning, when not used in direct reference to aspects of felt meanings. The aspects of felt meaning one finds are so very much more specific, and shift in such nonlogical modes, that aside from this use in pointing and differentiating, the concepts are not at all explanatory of anyone.³¹

²⁹ Gendlin, "Existentialism and Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 221-222.

³⁰ Gendlin, "Experiential Phenomenology," p. 307.

³¹ Gendlin, "Experiencing and the Nature of Concepts," p. 247.

The function of an experiential use of concepts in therapy is that they are used in direct interaction with experiencing and in a way that ~~furthers~~ furthers that experiencing. Gendlin shows clearly this subordinate role of concepts in relation to experiencing when, speaking on how to use knowledge in therapy, he urges:

1. To keep every bit of use of it anchored to a specific way a person directly feels, and to let the criterion of the knowledge be whether there is a response of the felt sense to that concept. If there is no response, then the concept must be discarded, and swiftly, before we become mired in some lengthly abstract discussion of why the concept is or is not correct.

2. If there is a response, again the concept must be dropped in favor of pursuing directly whatever felt sense or edge the concept helped one find.

3. This may change that very concept.³²

In a broader philosophical context Gendlin discusses very carefully some other ways in which concepts or symbols interact with experiencing, but what he insists on is that the words we use and the statements we make must always be in interplay with present experiencing if there is to be an experiential effect and the experiencing process is to be carried forward.³³ In the next chapter we will see that Gendlin's insistence on an experiential use of concepts in therapy has implications for religion as well.

³² Gendlin, "The Role of Knowledge in Practice," p. 283.

³³ see Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, especially Chapter 3.

Summary

The "experiencing" Gendlin is describing is a concrete individual reality as well as a concept. As a concrete process, it is the ongoing feeling I can directly refer to in my present experience. It is me; it is my sense of my living; it is my existence as lived.

This concrete experiencing is situated. It is me in my situations as an ongoing process of interaction. Experiencing is me as I live in my environment.

This same experiencing, this concrete living, is pre-conceptual. It has a kind of primacy over conceptualization, and yet it is implicitly meaningful in the sense that only certain words or symbols can accurately represent it.

Experiencing needs conceptualization. Only when the right words or symbols "fit" experiencing is it completed, changed, and carried forward. There is an interacting between experiencing and conceptualization. Concepts, in fact, have meaning only in so far as they are rooted in experiencing; they actually are an interaction between feeling or experiencing and verbal symbols. It is when they are used experientially that concepts refer to present experiencing in a way that changes that experiencing and carries it forward. A more concrete explication of the interaction between experiencing and conceptualization is presented in the following

section through a procedure called "focusing."

Although the integration of Gendlin's thinking with that of James is the task of the next chapter, already it is evident that Gendlin's phenomenology of "experiencing" furthers the contribution James's phenomenology has made to the "rehabilitation" of feeling. Gendlin's very direct attention to experiencing or feeling reveals:

a) that feeling can be directly referred to and need not be seen through a distanced phenomenology as something deduced from the inadequacies of concepts.

b) that the primacy of feeling comes from the fact that it is the living felt process of the individual and not a deduction based on "secondary" concepts.

c) that feeling is a pre-conceptual matrix different in kind from concepts and not just their static reflection.

d) that feeling is a continuous, implicitly meaningful process, which concepts and symbols can endlessly differentiate; there is a flow of feeling-to-concept, feeling-to-concept, and not just a static exercise of concept-to-feeling, and again, concept-to-feeling.

e) that feeling, while primary and foundational, is also an interacting with symbols and concepts, so that the experiencing process can be carried forward.

Let us now turn our attention to experiencing as a therapeutic and interpersonal process.

2. Therapeutic and Interpersonal Aspects of Experiencing.

We have viewed Gendlin's "experiencing" as an integrative concept allowing us to speak of "experience" as a living, interacting process, while also showing us how the explicit meanings we have arise out of a preconceptual matrix of felt, implicit meaning. In this section we shift our perspective and see the role "experiencing" plays at the heart of a description of therapeutic change.

In "A Theory of Personality Change," an article which systematically relates "experiencing" to therapy, Gendlin mentions two observations about personality change that most theorists seem to accept:

- (1) Major personality change involves some sort of intense affective or feeling process occurring in the individual.
- (2) Major personality change occurs nearly always in the context of an ongoing personal relationship.³⁴

The first observation, to which Gendlin relates "experiencing," is the concern of the first part of this section. We will look at "focusing," or "experiential focusing" as he some times calls it, which is a therapeutic way of paying attention to "experiencing" or "feeling," and we will observe the process of change as it unfolds, ideally at least, in four phases. In the second part of this section

34 Gendlin, "A Theory of Personality Change," p. 134.

we will turn to the second observation. We will see the role of the interpersonal relationship and its significance for the quality or manner of the "experiencing" process.

a) Focusing and Therapeutic Change.

Gendlin has developed an experiential procedure called "focusing," which is a therapeutic way of helping the person pay attention to present feeling so that it can change, shift, and be carried forward as an ongoing process. The ability to focus is a skill. It is usually not that hard to learn to do, but it is a way of relating to ourselves we ordinarily do not engage in.

Usually, we tell ourselves how we are feeling, what is wrong, what the problem is. Focusing is a complete shift in direction. If we can stop and let ourselves pay attention to present "experiencing," gradually it will tell us what it is. The process of focusing is not only a step-by-step coming to know what is there, but also a way of being released, changed, and carried forward. In focusing, we find that words can come from "experiencing" which make a felt difference in the way we are.

Just how does a person actually do "focusing"? Gendlin offers a procedure for focusing in his book by the same title.³⁵

³⁵ Eugene T. Gendlin, Focusing, New York, Everest House, 1978.

This procedure can be done alone or with the help of another.

Focusing Manual³⁶

1. What I will ask you to do will be silent, just to yourself. Take a moment just to relax . . . (5 seconds). All right--now, inside you, I would like you to pay attention to a very special part of you. . . . pay attention to that part where you usually feel sad, glad, or scared (5 seconds). Pay attention to that area in you and see how you are now.
See what comes to you when you ask yourself, "How am I now?" "How do I feel?" "What is the main thing for me right now?" Sense how you feel. Let the answers come slowly from this sensing. When something comes, DO NOT GO INSIDE IT. Stand back, say "Yes, that's there. I can feel that, there." Let there be a little space between you and that. Then ask what else you feel. Wait again, and sense. Usually there are several things.
2. From among what came, select one personal problem to focus on. DO NOT GO INSIDE IT. Stand back from it.
Of course, there are many parts to that one thing you are thinking about--too many to think of each one alone. But, you can feel all of these things together. Pay attention there where you usually feel things, and in there you can get a sense of what all of the problem feels like. Let yourself feel all of that (1 minute).

36 Ibid., p. 48-49. It should be noted that the "focusing" Gendlin describes may suggest the image of a person looking at some felt "thing," an image that seems a bit static and one that could call to mind the subject-object dichotomy. Gendlin is aware of this tendency of the word "focusing" and he points out in "The Experiential Response," in Use of Interpretation in Treatment, Ed. by Emanuel F. Hammer, New York, Grune and Stratton, 1968, p. 212: "The term 'focusing' seems like a 'looking at' a felt datum. Really it is a process in which focuser and datum are one, and both change, as focusing is ongoing. One cannot attend to a feeling without thereby feeling it in a way one didn't moments earlier. To 'focus on' is also a 'feeling further' which explicates what is felt." (Italics mine)

3. As you pay attention to the whole feeling of it, you may find that one special feeling comes up. Let yourself pay attention to that one feeling (1 minute):
Keep following one feeling. Don't let it be just words or pictures--wait and let words or pictures come from the feeling (1 minute).
If this one feeling changes, or moves, let it do that. Whatever it does, follow the feeling and pay attention to it (1 minute).
4. Now, take what is fresh, or new, in the feel of it now . . . and go very easy.
Just as you feel it, try to find some new words or pictures to capture what your present feeling is all about. There doesn't have to be anything that you didn't know before. New words are best but old words might fit just as well as long as you now find words or a picture to say what is fresh to you now (1 minute).
If the words or pictures that you now have make some fresh difference, see what that is. Let the words or pictures change until they feel just right in capturing your feeling (1 minute).
5. Check your words or picture. Ask your body "Is that right?" Wait to see its response.

What happens therapeutically to "experiencing" when a person focuses is described by Gendlin in four phases. These phases are: first, a direct reference or paying attention to present feeling; second, a gradual unfolding of the feeling that is there with appropriate words or pictures to say what that is; third, a global application of what unfolds to other situations of the person; and fourth, a referent movement, that is, a change of what is there in present feeling, so that now what is directly referred to is different and the focusing process becomes ongoing. Let us look at an example of what the "experiencing" process is like for a person through these

four phases.

1. Direct Reference (First Phase)

In this initial phase of focusing, the person directly refers to present, concretely there, but conceptually vague feeling. Gendlin takes as an example the case of a hypothetical individual:

Let us say he has been discussing some troublesome situation or personal trait. He has described various events, emotions, opinions, and interpretations. Perhaps he has called himself "foolish," "unrealistic," and assured his listener that he really "knows better" than to react in the way he does. He is puzzled by his own reactions, and he disapproves of them. Or, what amounts to be the same thing, he strongly defends his reactions against some real or imaginary critic who would say that the reactions make no sense, are self-defeating, unrealistic, and foolish. If he is understandingly listened to and responded to, he may be able to refer directly to the felt meaning which the matter has for him. He may then lay aside, for a moment, all his better judgment or bad feeling about the fact that he is as he is, and he may refer directly to the felt meaning of what he is talking about. He may then say something like: "Well, I know it makes no sense, but in some ways it does." Or: "It's awfully vague to me what this is with me, but I feel it pretty definitely." It may seem as if language and logic are insufficient, but the trouble is merely that we are not used to talking about something which is conceptually vague, but definitely and distinctly felt.

If the individual continues to focus his attention on this direct referent (if he does not break off attending to it because it seems too foolish, or too bad, or too doubtful whether he isn't just coddling himself, etc.), he may become able to conceptualize some rough aspects of it. For example, he may find: "I feel that way whenever anyone does such-and-such to me." Or: "I think there is something about that kind of thing which could make something completely terrible and frightening happen to me, but that's silly. You have

to accept things like that: That's life. But that's the way it feels, kind of a terror."³⁷

In direct reference the person is trying to focus on his present feeling. As he begins to focus, he may use the words "this" or "this way I feel" as a way for him and for the therapist to point to what the client is concretely experiencing. Even when the present feeling of the client is very vague, both he and the therapist can use words to directly refer to it.

As the client comes to symbolize his present feeling as "frightening" or "silly" or "terrible," it should be pointed out that it is not an emotion he is attending to but the complex circumstances and personal aspects he feels in his present situation. If the client feels emotion (anger, for example), he can wait a while and see what that emotion is all about; he can let the emotion subside a bit to see the underlying situation out of which the emotion arises. It is the feeling, the felt sense of the present situation underlying the emotion, that the client attends to in direct reference.

What often happens in this first phase of focusing is that the person becomes excited or amazed that he can focus on himself in this way. He begins to value this kind of

37 Gendlin, "A Theory of Personality Change," p. 142.

process because it "feels good" even though "what's there" and "where it's all going" are still not very clear. There is a sense of rightness in the process, a kind of relief, and a lessening of anxiety.³⁸

2. Unfolding (Second Phase)

Sometimes in focusing on present, directly felt experiencing, there is a kind of step-by-step coming to know explicitly what it is. There is an opening up, an unfolding, which may be quite sudden and dramatic or may be slow and gradual. Again, Gendlin describes the typical kind of unfolding a person may experience:

Yes, of course he is afraid, he realizes. He has not permitted himself even to think about dealing with this and this aspect of the situation, and this has been because he has not believed that these aspects really existed. Well, yes, he did realize they existed, but he also felt compelled to blame himself for them as if he really imagined them. And if they do exist (and they do), he does not know how he could possibly live with them. He has not allowed himself to try to deal with them (he now realizes) or even to consider them anything other than merely his imagination, because, my God, if they are really there, then he is helpless. Then there is nothing he can do! But they are there. Well, it is a relief to know at least that.³⁹

This example shows the multiplicity to be found in any felt meaning, in any vague "this" that can be directly

³⁸ Ibid., p. 143.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 145.

referred to. And again, in this second phase of unfolding, there is a sense of relief, even though what is symbolized or verbalized may seem terrible or unsolvable.

Furthermore, in the unfolding of a direct referent, there is usually a surprising and deeply emotional recognition of the good sense of the feeling. "'Of course,' we say over and over, 'of course!' Or, we say 'Well, what do you know, that's what that was!'"⁴⁰

As what is felt opens up and makes sense, Gendlin finds that along with the felt reduction in tension a kind of change takes place which is more basic than the solution to a specific problem. He observes:

. . . when a direct referent of experiencing "opens up," much more change has occurred than the cognitive realization of this or that. This is most dramatically evident when, after the "unfolding," the individual still sees no way out. He says, "At least I know what it is now, but how will I ever change it or deal with it?" Yet, during the following days and in the next therapy hour, it turns out that he is already different, that the quality of the problem has changed and his behaviour has been different. And, as for a good explanation of all this resolution . . . "well, it just seems all right now." There is a global change in the whole manner of experiencing in this regard.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

3. Global Application (Third Phase)

Often in the moments which immediately follow the unfolding of a direct referent the individual is flooded by "many different associations, memories, situations, and circumstances, all in relation to the felt referent."⁴² These come from the same felt meaning, and yet they may be about different and unrelated matters. Typically, the individual may say:

"Oh, and that's also why I can't get up any enthusiasm for this-and-this." "Yes, and another thing about it is, this comes in every time someone tells me what to do or think. I can't say, well, what I think is more important, because, see, this way of making myself wrong comes in there." "Oh, and also, back when this and this happened, I did the same thing."⁴³

Gendlin notes that often the individual is silent in this third phase; the change that occurs is global, but all the different applications need not be made explicitly.⁴⁴ What is made explicit in this period of wide application is often called "insight," but he cautions against an understanding of what the term seems to suggest:

I realize that some of the foregoing observations have been termed by others as "insight." I believe that is a misnomer. First, the global application is

⁴² Ibid., p. 146.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 146-147.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

in no way a figuring out, nor is it chiefly a better understanding. Rather, insight and better understanding are the results, the by-products, of this process, as a few of its very many changed aspects call attention to themselves. One can be sure that for every relation or application the individual here explicitly thinks, there are thousands which he does not think of, but which have, nevertheless, just changed. Not his thinking about the difference which the unfolding has made, but the unfolding itself, changes him in all these thousands of respects. The change occurs whether or not he thinks of any such applications, and whether or not he considers the unfolding to be a resolving.⁴⁵

4. Referent Movement (Fourth Phase)

Usually, after the three phases of focusing just described, a movement or shift in the experiencing is felt, and what the individual can now directly refer to in experiencing has changed.

Usually direct reference alone does not change or move the direct referent, but does make it stronger, sharper, and more distinctly felt. It increases its intensity as a feeling and diminishes the diffuse tension, discomfort and anxiety. However, sometimes the mere process of continuous direct reference will change or "move" the direct referent. More often, such a movement occurs after at least some unfolding and symbolizing, and especially after the felt flooding of global application.⁴⁶

While there may seem to be no "solution to the problem," in effect, the problem has changed in that the meaning of the whole situation has changed. And it is this changed meaning

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 147.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

of the experiencing, or changed felt referent, that Gendlin is calling "referent movement." With referent movement the process has come full circle (or full spiral): there is a change in experiencing which creates a new felt referent. Referent movement is the completion of the experiencing process, providing at the same time a new direction from which it continues or begins again.⁴⁷

The referent movement itself is described in the following way:

The individual distinctly feels a change in the quality of the felt referent. It is not only a change but a directly experienced "give" or "movement" which feels right and welcome. Its tremendous importance lies in the fact that after such a referent movement (even very small), the implicit meanings are now different. The "scenery," as it were, which one confronts, changes.⁴⁸

We should note at this point that the whole focusing process in its four phases is an expanded and therapeutic description of the interaction between experiencing and symbolization viewed in the previous section. Each of the four phases is, in fact, an aspect of this interacting, because in each phase some symbolization comes from paying attention to what is there in present feeling. Focusing, whether done alone or with the help of another, is a process of therapeutic change.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

b) The Interpersonal Response and The Manner of Experiencing.

We now shift our attention to the importance for the experiencing process of the other in an interpersonal relationship. We observe that there is a very definite correlation between the response of an other to our experiencing and the way or manner in which we live as a felt process of interaction with ourselves, others, and our situations in general.

To begin with, it needs to be said that our feelings are culturally patterned. A person develops in an interpersonal, cultural, and linguistic environment. In fact, as Gendlin points out, "the individual is cultural, social, and interpersonal before he is an individual."⁴⁹ In reviewing Martin Heidegger's What Is a Thing? he observes:

Not only the other people of past history but the other people of now are already an inherent part of what a person is. One is always a being with and a being towards others, and human situations are not possible without this.⁵⁰

Language, then, is learned only in the context of interpersonally meaningful interaction; it is in this way that words have meaning and can then be used in interaction.

⁴⁹ Gendlin, "Neurosis and Human Nature in the Experiential Method of Thought and Therapy," p. 141.

⁵⁰ Eugene T. Gendlin, "Analysis," in Martin Heidegger, What Is a Thing?, trans. by W.B. Barton, Jr., and Vera Deutsch, Chicago, Regnery, 1967, p. 286.

with present experiencing.⁵¹

In therapy this interpersonal dimension of experiencing is extremely significant. Gendlin believes that successful psychotherapy of any type involves at its core the interpersonal encounter.⁵² The reason is that any genuine relationship facilitates a new and different experiential process.⁵³

He observes:

We know, but currently find it hard to investigate or explain, why the client's change and improvement depend so largely upon the interpersonal relationship with the therapist. This is really what changes him, for alone he can think about the same things, yet he remains as he is. We can account for this only if we notice (as we easily can in our own experience and in observations) how different is the experiencing of an individual in a relationship with another, than it is when he is alone, and also, how there are differences in his manner of experiencing in different relationships. I may say and think the same given content under these different circumstances, but my experiencing along with this content will be widely different. My sense of you, the listener, affects my experiencing as I speak, and your response partly determines my experiencing a moment later. What occurs to me, and how I live as we speak and interact, is vitally affected by every word and motion you make, and by every facial expression and attitude you show.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Gendlin, "Values and the Process of Experiencing," p. 190.

⁵² Gendlin, "Existentialism and Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 213.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 224.

⁵⁴ Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, p. 38.

Paying more attention to experiencing and the process of change, Gendlin continues:

It is not really a matter of what I think you feel about me. Much more, I am affected even without stopping to notice it by every response you give me. I experience your responses. I may come away thinking that, in my opinion, you can feel little liking for me, yet my whole experiential life in the time I spent with you will have been affected not by this opinion of mine, but by our moment-to-moment behaviors which you helped make, which were part of my experiencing as I spoke, thought, felt, and was. Thus it is not the case that I tell you about me, and then we figure out how I should change, and then somehow I do it. Rather, I am changing as I talk and think and feel, for your responses are every moment part of my experiencing, and partly affect, produce, symbolize, and interact with it. And only by this experiencing process (and the difference you make in its character) do I change.⁵⁵

In therapy, then, there is "all the difference between how one thinks and feels alone and how one thinks and feels with another person."⁵⁶ As Gendlin notes, the conceptual content may seem, at least for a time, to be the same either alone or with another, but soon, in an interpersonal context, "the manner of experiencing will be totally different."⁵⁷

The Manner of Experiencing

With reference to the interpersonal response, Gendlin uses the phrase "manner of experiencing" to describe the

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 38-39.

⁵⁶ Gendlin, "A Theory of Personality Change," p. 152.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

quality of experiencing's "ongoingness." For example, experiencing may have a certain immediacy or presentness so that the person is alive and at the center of what is being experienced, or it may seem more dried up or dead and the person feel: "Life is going on all right, but I'm in some back room. I merely hear about it, I'm not living it."⁵⁸ To put it another way, a person's concrete experiencing may have a "host of fresh details," which could easily be symbolized and differentiated, or it may be "structured," with the same old stale patterns recurring.⁵⁹

Commenting on how "stale" experiencing patterns are usually discussed, Gendlin describes clearly what he means by the manner of experiencing:

In such instances psychologists are inclined to notice chiefly the content of the stale pattern. We say: "This is a protesting reaction against authority," or "this is a need to dominate," or a "partial" infantile sex drive such as "voyeurism," or "exhibitionism," or a "passive-aggressive need." We tend to neglect the fact that such feeling patterns are also different in manner from an immediate, present, and richly detailed experiencing. It is not only that I react poorly to authority. Rather, I react this way to every person whom I perceive as an authority. And, more important, I react only to his being an authority, not to him as a person, and to the very many present facets of him and our situation which are different from any other situation. The "authority pattern," or any similar pattern, is really

58 Ibid., p. 153.

59 Ibid.

only a bare outline. My experiencing is structure-bound in manner, when I experience only this bare outline and feel only this bare set of emotions, lacking the myriad of fresh detail of the present.⁶⁰

Gendlin feels that we often speak of "contents" of experience as if they were well-defined units with a set structure, but this is only the case to the extent that experiencing is structure-bound in manner and not able to function implicitly in each new situation. Speaking in a context of interpersonal experiencing, he notes:

Unless my experiences implicitly function so that I can newly understand you, I cannot really understand you at all. Insofar as my experiencing is structure bound, it does not implicitly function. It is not "seamlessly" felt by me with its thousands of implicit aspects functioning so that I arrive at some fresh meaning, something you are trying to convey to me. Rather, in this regard, my experience is a "frozen whole" and will not give up its structure.⁶¹

Neurosis and Psychosis

A blocked or structure-bound manner of experiencing is Gendlin's way of discussing what are commonly understood as neurosis and psychosis. After mentioning that the neuroses Freud found are now rare, he points out:

. . . today the typical patient seeks a sense of identity, a sense of autonomy, a sense of strength to meet life. He seeks a feeling of really being there, of being involved. Notice that these are all non-content descriptions. He desires to stand strong

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 153-154.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 154.

in his life, "to be on top of it." He lacks a certain manner of living, a manner of experiencing, a manner of feeling, a manner of meeting situations. This is usually the difficulty, rather than content, pattern, repetition, compulsion, or pathological thoughts. There are still a few classical neuroses to be found, but for the most part the problem is how to put an alive, experiential living process together with increasingly lifeless social roles, situations, concepts, words.⁶²

For Gendlin, then, there are two elements in what is called a neurosis. First, the individual is faced with a problem or a situational difficulty that does not seem able to be lived or solved, and second, the individual lacks the experiential focusing needed to carry his feeling in the situation further.⁶³

The psychosis is also described by Gendlin in terms, not of content, but of the manner of the experiencing process:

When the apperceptive flow of differentiable felt experience is narrowed, then words and events are not interpreted by an ongoing feeling process. Reactions and interpretations are no longer modifications of this felt sentence, as we are accustomed to have it. Rather, it is all dark and dank, swampy and silent, stuck and dully painful. Passively, with only little ongoing sentient flow, an individual still watches the rampant specters. But these are weird childlike imagery. Such imagery is very, very much akin to the small child's imagery when he is left alone at night for a long time. His interactive process ceases, his capacity to respond to himself in human in-the-world ways is not great enough to carry his own experiencing forward and, instead, very psychoticlike imagery

⁶² Gendlin, "Neurosis and Human Nature in the Experiential Method of Thought and Therapy," p. 143.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 150.

appears.⁶⁴

Gendlin continues, stressing again the importance of the interpersonal response for the manner of experiencing:

Respond to the person (or the "psychotic contents") in an adult way but similarly to the way you would respond to a weirdly frightened child, and an ongoing human process will replace the psychotic material. That "material" is not "contents" in him, but a manner, a mode, that mode in which there is too little ongoing interaction-with.⁶⁵

"Psychosis," says Gendlin, "is not an entity in people that erupts."⁶⁶ Again, given the unlivable situation, the important thing is whether or not the individual is helped in carrying his experiencing process forward.⁶⁷

From the perspective of the manner of experiencing, what is called for in therapy is a "reconstitution" of the experiencing process. Recalling that experiencing is a process or interaction between feeling and symbolization, we can now understand the interpersonal response as a very powerful kind of symbolizing, which can affect the individual's manner of experiencing. Gendlin maintains that "if there is a

⁶⁴ Gendlin, "Existentialism and Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 242.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 243; see also Eugene T. Gendlin, "Therapeutic Procedures with Schizophrenic Patients," in The Theory and Practice of Psychotherapy With Specific Disorders, Ed. by Max Hammer, Springfield, Illinois, Thomas, 1972, p. 335.

response, there will be an ongoing interaction process.

Certain aspects of the personality will be "in process". However, without the response, there will not (in those respects) be a process at all."⁶⁸ In other words, the interpersonal response can loosen the blocked or structure-bound manner of experiencing and allow it to be a process again. "Responses can reconstitute the experiencing process in respects in which, before the response, there was no process (no interaction between feeling and something else and hence no ongoing interaction process)."⁶⁹

Summary

Experiential focusing is a method whereby present experiencing or feeling can be attended to and symbolized in order to bring about an ongoingness or change in that experiencing. As an individual directly refers to experiencing, that experiencing becomes more directly felt, and perhaps a few words arise that seem to "fit" it. As the process continues there is a more explicit opening up or unfolding of experiencing as new aspects of it come into awareness and are able to be conceptualized. Often after this unfolding the individual is flooded with many other aspects or situations that are related to this same experiencing or feeling. And

⁶⁸ Gendlin, "A Theory of Personality Change," p. 155.

⁶⁹ Ibid.



finally, as this experiencing becomes adequately unfolded and symbolized, a shift in experiencing is felt; there is a movement in the direct referent as experiencing changes and becomes ongoing.

The change which Gendlin describes includes not only a dialectic between experiencing and symbolization, but it also involves a difference in the manner of experiencing. This manner of experiencing, which most often is a function of the response of present interpersonal experiencing, can be seen on a scale, with a sense of immediacy, presentness, and aliveness at one end and staleness with structure-bound patterns at the other.

Neuroses and psychoses are ways of describing a blocked or perhaps severely diminished manner of experiencing. In these instances of blocked or stopped experiencing, what is called for is an interpersonal response which can touch the individual's present experiencing and begin to reconstitute those aspects of it which are not ongoing or implicitly functioning.

In the next chapter, Gendlin's findings with respect to focusing and with respect to the interpersonal response and the manner of experiencing will be applied specifically to the phenomenon of "religious experiencing." At this point, it need only be said that if religion can be described as an aspect of a given person's experiencing process, then a number

of intriguing possibilities arise for a process understanding of religious experience.

3. Four Characteristics of the Process of Experiencing.

Now that we have seen Gendlin's basic description of "experiencing," and now that we have seen "experiencing" in a therapeutic setting as a process which can unfold and change in manner, we are in a position to highlight four characteristics of the process of experiencing which will be especially significant in working toward a process understanding of religious experience. These four characteristics are:

- a) Contents as Process Aspects; b) Valuing and the Experiencing Process; c) The Experiencing Process as Directional; and d) The Experiencing Process as Growth.

a) Contents as Process Aspects.

A "content" for Gendlin is simply a symbolized or conceptualized unit of implicitly felt meaning. In order for there to be a content, some aspect of implicit functioning must be in interaction with symbols.⁷⁰ If we can symbolize the experiencing, we can say what it is of or what it contains.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 156.

In Gendlin's thinking, what we normally call "contents," for example, "This person has a lot of anxiety," are really aspects of an ongoing felt process; "contents are process aspects."⁷¹ As Gendlin observes:

We tend to neglect the fact that contents are process aspects. We pay the most attention to contents as symbolized meanings with specific logical implications (which they also are). Hence we often discuss self-exploration as if it were purely a logical inquiry in search of conceptual answers. However, in psychotherapy (or in one's private self-exploration as well) the logical contents and insights are secondary. Process has primacy.⁷²

The content-like concept is dependent upon and really a function of the experiencing process, and as we will see in the next chapter, this finding is true for religion as well as psychotherapy.

As we have already seen in the structure-bound manner of experiencing, it is easy to understand the person in terms of content, especially since this content is static. Yet, even here Gendlin insists on viewing this kind of content in the broader context of a process that should be ongoing.

Just as hunger is not a thing or a state, but a tendency toward eating, so also psychological contents are not really "contents," but tendencies toward living processes that are stuck or have not happened yet. To "find" a trouble-spot is not like finding a thing or an object, but like finding a hunger, a process that should be happening or continuing, and is

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 158.



not.⁷³

Two points should be made here in terms of the "content" we are considering. First, when the experiencing process is ongoing (as it is, for example, in focusing), the symbolization of that ongoing process will be continuously changing. We can say, therefore, that the content is continuously changing as the process is ongoing. Second, we can say that a different manner of experiencing, especially the change brought about in experiencing by the interpersonal response, will give different contents as well. As Gendlin observes: ". . . the client will not find the same "things" inside him during a close relationship with a caring therapist, as will seem to be inside him when feeling quite alone and incapacitated."⁷⁴ Contents are aspects of the experiencing process.

b) Valuing and the Experiencing Process.

In his "Values and the Process of Experiencing" Gendlin presents yet another characteristic of the experiencing process. In this article Gendlin points out that what we usually call "values" are really only conclusions and that it is far more important to pay attention to the process that leads to these conclusions. As he puts it, "what counts is

⁷³ Gendlin, "The Role of Knowledge in Practice," p. 277.

⁷⁴ Gendlin, "Experiential Psychotherapy," p. 337.

the manner of the process leading to value-conclusions, not the abstract conclusions alone."⁷⁵

Relying on his descriptions of "focusing" and the "manner of experiencing," Gendlin shows how the valuing process actually occurs:

The order in which experiential valuing occurs is the reverse of how it is so often portrayed. We do not first adopt value-conclusions from some system and then apply them to choose between different possibilities. First we must confront and differentiate experienced meanings (felt meanings). Then we find that these now differentiated felt meanings have a significant feel of good or bad, resolved or conflicted. If the latter, we resolve them by differentiating still further and further. For any meaningful problem many steps are required, many instances of "direct reference," "unfolding," and "referent movement." The seeming interpolated value-direction may shift many times. The process has its own direction, its own concrete referent which is "next" for it, and the felt meanings have their own inward feel of resolution or conflict, constriction or relief, resentment or freeing, fresh realness or stuffy, isolated autism, and just plain good or bad.⁷⁶

The direction of experiencing, then, is not based on or determined by "values." Rather, it is the reverse that is true. It is the experiencing and its felt differentiation which determines what the individual values and the direction of the valuing process.

In relating the experiencing process to value-conclusions, Gendlin makes an important distinction. There are, he

⁷⁵ Gendlin, "Values and the Process of Experiencing," p. 181.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 185.

says, "(1) value conclusions adopted without an experiential process from which they could arise; and (2) value-conclusions adopted from an experiential process leading to them."⁷⁷

Within the first category of value-conclusions, that is, those not arising from an experiential process, Gendlin makes another important distinction which, as we will see, has direct application to religious valuing:

(1a) Value-conclusions without an experiential process leading to them can be adopted in a sense which inclines one to readiness to experience what the conclusions imply. In this trouble-free form of 1, the individual expects to experience some day what the value-conclusions involve. This expectation makes him more able to perceive the relevant, rather than other, equally valid, meanings in such experiencing, should it arise. The expectation also makes him more willing to give time, patience, and repeated trials to opportunities for such relevant experiences. In all these ways, influence type 1a succeeds in making it more likely that the individual will, at some time, arrive at the experiential concreteness of the values he has verbally adopted.⁷⁸

On the other hand, the absence of the process can be experienced in a wholly different way:

(1b) Value-conclusions can be adopted without the experiential process leading to them, but accompanied by experiences of confusion, denial, conflict, and surrender of certain areas of enterprise. Such an adoption usually makes it less likely that the individual will ever obtain the experiential process leading to these values, than that he will arrive experientially at other values. It has a thousand

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 196.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

side effects, including the predictable behavior differences involved in attempting to act as though he really had the given values, along with failure consequences, conflicts or inferiority, abasement, and resentment.⁷⁹

Value-conclusions, much like the concepts that convey them, can have an experiential base or they can exist in the individual apart from his process of experiencing. The verbal meaning of these value-conclusions may be the same in either case, but their function in the ongoing process of the individual may be very different.

c) The Experiencing Process as Directional.

From what we have seen so far in this section of the primacy of process in relation to content and especially of the direction of the valuing process in relation to value-conclusions, it is fair to say that Gendlin sees the direction of the experiencing process as coming from within the process itself.

In the process of focusing, what Gendlin calls the "focal center" of that process is a function of what was previously felt and symbolized, and each new focal centre of the process arises as present experiencing is again symbolized and carried forward. What comes next is determined by the experiencing itself as it is ongoing. Gendlin points out in

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 196-197.

describing focal centering:

The steps of a therapeutic process cannot be determined by decision, neither the therapist's nor even the patient's. There is a hierarchy according to which these steps come, and no prior logical decision can guess it. A perfectly right interpretation may be only confusing at one point and helpful at a later point. What comes now is what must come now, what is focal and next for the organism.⁸⁰

Allowing for the fact that the individual process of experiencing does have its own sense of direction, Gendlin speculates as to whether there is any common direction to the process of experiencing or whether the continuously shifting value-direction of an individual will ultimately lead toward universal values. As he phrases the question: "Is it the case that a great many kinds of value-conclusions are never the result of this experiential process? Is it the case that only certain kinds of value-conclusions can result from it?"⁸¹ Gendlin himself is sure that only certain kinds of value-directions can come from the experiencing process, but the way these values are to be described can only be the result of further investigation and the study of ongoing experiencing.⁸²

⁸⁰ Gendlin, "Experiential Psychotherapy, p. 336.

⁸¹ Gendlin, "Values and the Process of Experiencing," p. 187.

⁸² Ibid., p. 189.

d) The Experiencing Process as Growth.

Gendlin uses the concept of "growth" very sparingly in his writings, yet it seems clear that the ongoingness of experiencing which he describes is an experientially defined process of growth.

The basic dynamic of the growth process is evident in "experiential focusing." There, as we have seen, the ability to symbolize or conceptualize a directly-referred-to feeling has the effect of carrying forward the experiencing process.⁸³ Within the four phases of experiential focusing there is a bodily felt step or shift of the organism which is a living forward of the experiencing of the individual, especially as that experiencing is understood as organism-environment or inside-outside. The shift in feeling (the referent movement), is a further living in one's situation. Moreover, in a series

⁸³ For an explicit description of growth which is "strongly influenced" by Gendlin's thinking see Sidney M. Jourard, Disclosing Man To Himself, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1968, especially chapter 13, "Growing Experience and the Experience of Growth," p. 152-172. For example, in terms of the dependency of concepts Jourard observes:

I am going to contend that when my concepts--of myself, of you, of cars, of cows, of trees, and of refrigerators--are shattered, and I again face the world with a questioning attitude; when I face the being in question and let it disclose itself to me (it always was disclosing, but I paid it no attention after I conceptualized it); and when I re-form my concept on the basis of this newly received disclosure--then, I have grown. p. 157.

of these steps or shifts there comes an increase in the implicit aliveness of the experiencing process and a resolution of one's problem of living in the present situation.

Gendlin's description of neurosis and psychosis also spells out, in a negative way, what the process of growth is. As we have seen, there are two elements in these kinds of blocked or stopped experiencing: first, the individual is faced with a situational difficulty that does not seem able to be lived; and second, the experiential focusing is lacking that would carry the experiencing further in the situation. Experiencing as a process of growth, therefore, would seem to entail an ongoing living in one's situations, and where those situations are difficult, a way of living further in them through focusing.

The implications which experiencing as a process of growth has for "religious experiencing" will be taken up in a section on "Religious Experiencing and Growth" in the next chapter. At this point, it need only be said that Gendlin's "experiencing," especially its description in terms of the four phases of experiential focusing (and in terms of "carrying forward" and "living further," is a thoroughly experiential or concrete definition of growth.

Summary

We have paid special attention to four characteristics of Gendlin's "experiencing" because these characteristics have direct implications for the "religious experiencing" and "experiential religion" I want to describe in the next chapter.

In using the term "content" Gendlin shows that, as a form of symbolization, it is an aspect of the experiencing process. Even when the "content" is very pronounced, as in neurosis and psychosis, still it is to be seen, not as some "thing" in the individual, but as an aspect of the experiencing process which needs to be. There are implications here for religious "content."

In effect, the experiencing process which Gendlin describes is a valuing process. Values, like contents, are aspects of the process of experiencing. It is important to pay attention to the process out of which values--religious values included--arise and not to see them as entities apart from that process.

There is also a sense of direction in the experiencing process. What is "next" for the individual or what becomes focal in his experiencing arises from within that experiencing, and neither the individual himself nor anyone else can determine its direction. When continuously attended to, however, the experiencing process does seem to tend toward common and universal values.

Finally, the experiencing process as ongoing is a process of growth. This ongoingness implies that the individual can live fully as organism-environment, and when blocking occurs, he is able to live further in his situations through experiential focusing.

In this section highlighting four characteristics of Gendlin's "experiencing," the primacy of experiencing as a process surfaces again. In their own ways "content," "values," "direction," and "growth" are each different perspectives or different aspects of the felt process of the individual. Gendlin's understanding and articulation of "experiencing" as a process is what I want to apply to religion in the section on "religious experiencing," the first section of the next chapter.

4. Critical Reflections.

There are any number of features of Gendlin's thinking that seem to me to be especially attractive and important. One such feature is the way he consistently remains engaged with the concrete phenomenon of "experiencing." In all his various ways of describing what experiencing is and how it functions, he is simply pointing out aspects which can be experienced. His "feeling" is felt and can be directly referred to. Words do come from feeling. Unfolding does occur. And a bodily felt shift and referent movement can be

experienced (I have experienced it myself and have seen it in counseling). Gendlin is a truly gifted phenomenologist of concrete feeling.

A second feature of Gendlin's understanding of experiencing, one which flows from his very concrete phenomenology, is that experiencing or feeling is essentially a process. It is meant to function implicitly and be ongoing, and usually in its many aspects it is ongoing. The person is an ongoing process of experiencing..

Another eminently usable feature of Gendlin's thinking is that he does not merely predicate experiencing as a process, but he actually describes how the process is ongoing. Experiencing is an interaction between feeling and symbolization. Feeling and symbolization or conceptualization are necessarily correlated and interdependent. James's analogy that feeling and concepts are "two legs" needed for walking is even truer for Gendlin's thinking. Feeling and concepts are the walking; they are the ongoing process of experiencing.

Not only does Gendlin describe experiencing as an ongoing process, but he also shows that, given a client's blocked experiencing and given the right kind of interpersonal response, the process of experiencing is the process of therapeutic change. And this process of change is not in terms of a "before" and an "after." Rather there is a concretely observable manner of experiencing which is changing

as the interpersonal encounter is ongoing.

An additional feature of Gendlin's "experiencing" is that it is foundational. Experiencing is a kind of ur-phenomenon or, in James's phrase, a "germ and starting point."⁸⁴ Experiencing is what I am right now; and it is always there as what I am right now. It is also me as I am bodily in my present situations and in the endless ways those situations can be differentiated. What I can understand as meaning is rooted in experiencing. Valuing is rooted in experiencing. The interpersonal is rooted in experiencing. In fact, all the concepts that I use are rooted in experiencing.

The major thrust of Gendlin's involvement with the concrete, interpersonal process of experiencing--especially in terms of its ongoingness--is in relation to therapy.⁸⁵ What the interpersonal response might further in the experiencing, for example, of a person whose manner of experiencing is already basically alive and immediate is not clear--or at least it raises several questions. Is the manner of experiencing to be understood directly as a function of the continuum

⁸⁴ William James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. I, New York, Dover, 1950, p. 222.

⁸⁵ It must be noted that in Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, p. 90-137, Gendlin describes six ways in addition to "direct reference" in which symbols can interact with experiencing, but he does not give flesh and substance to their description as he does with the concrete process of therapy.

from stopped experiencing to experiencing that is alive and fresh in detail? Or can basically alive and ongoing experiencing be further characterized with respect to its manner or quality as the thrust of some of the work in transpersonal psychology seems to suggest?⁸⁶ Questions such as these must be the subject of further reflection and research.

Now that we have seen Gendlin's description of "feeling" or "experiencing" and how it functions in therapeutic change and growth, we are in a position to see how this feeling can be brought together with James's insights into feeling and the way it functions in living religion. Some of the linkages between their thinking have already been made, and some others can readily be inferred. The task at the beginning of the next chapter is to describe an actual process of "religious experiencing" and to show explicitly how this phenomenon flows from the thinking of James and Gendlin:

⁸⁶ I am thinking specifically of the contributions of three writers: Abraham H. Maslow, The Farther Reaches of Human Nature, New York, Viking, 1971; Ira Progoff, The Symbolic and the Real, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1963; and Wilson Van Dusen, The Natural Depth in Man, New York, Harper & Row, 1972.

CHAPTER IV

A PROCESS UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCING, GROWTH, AND EXPERIENTIAL RELIGION

Let me begin this chapter by bringing our attention back to the central concerns of the thesis and by reviewing their development briefly. The concern of Chapter I was to lay the groundwork for working toward a process understanding of religious experience by showing some of the helpful and, in fact, converging ways religious experience can be approached phenomenologically. In the first section, we looked at passages of Marcel, Tillich, and Rogers which offered some insights and unearthed some questions important for investigating religious experience. In the next section, "Three Issues in the Psychology of Religion," the concepts of "religious experience" and "religious feeling" took on a bit more definition while evidence began to accumulate which suggested the importance of seeing this experience phenomenologically as a living process. In the last section of the chapter, I proposed that the thinking of James and Gendlin offers a response to the questions and issues of the previous sections as it helps to further the process understanding of religious experience I want to articulate. I stated as the central thesis question:

Can I draw on the phenomenology of religious

feeling of William James and on the phenomenon of "feeling" or "experiencing" of Eugene Gendlin in order to describe and elaborate "religious feeling" or "religious experiencing" as a felt, living process of the person?

We looked carefully, in Chapter II, at the phenomenology of religious feeling of William James, paying special attention to the role of feeling in the Varieties and to the sense of process there and in some of his other writings. In Chapter III, we viewed the phenomenon of feeling or experiencing of Eugene Gendlin, seeing from several perspectives how (it is essentially a process which, when ongoing, is a description of therapeutic change and growth.

We are now ready to describe and elaborate "religious experiencing" as a personal process. The first section of this chapter offers a basic description of this phenomenon. Four elements constitutive of "religious experiencing" are discussed and then traced to their roots in James and Gendlin.

In the next section the questions about religious experience from the thinking of Marcel, Tillich, and Rogers and the three issues which arose in the psychology of religion are reviewed in light of the "religious experiencing" just described.

The relation of "religious experiencing" to therapeutic change and growth is taken up in the third section. We see the intrinsic connection between "religious experiencing" and personal growth, while we also look at blocked

"religious experiencing" and at how that blocked experiencing can be focused on and carried forward.

In the final section of the chapter, we consider some implications which "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling" might have for an experiential approach to what is defined as religion. Here we are concerned with the basic elements describing the notion of "experiential religion."

1. A Basic Description of Religious Experiencing.

At this point we can respond to the thesis question by giving an initial articulation of "religious experiencing" as a process of the person. First, let me state in a paragraph the basic elements of "religious experiencing." Then, we will view these elements more closely, paying particular attention to how they are drawn from the thinking of James and Gendlin.

What is "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling"? It is a phenomenon which can be paid attention to. It lives in the person as presently felt and as something primary, which symbols and concepts can explicate and carry forward. It is essentially a felt relationship to the divine (broadly and variously defined). Finally, it is, or at least it can be, an unfolding process of the person, a process which is living and changing.

a) Religious Experiencing is a Presently Felt Phenomenon Which Can Be Referred To.

The first thing to say about "religious experiencing" is that it is primary, felt, and can be paid attention to. It exists for the person as a felt phenomenon, as something actually there in present bodily feeling. For the person who is in relation to God, this relation in its primacy is presently lived and bodily felt.

As an experientially irreducible phenomenon, "religious experiencing" is primary. It does not present itself as derived from other feelings or from concepts. Concepts and symbols, in fact, come from it and help refer back to it. "Religious experiencing," as a presently felt phenomenon, has primacy in respect to the words and symbols we use to pay attention to it.

At any time a person can directly refer to the present sense of how things are in relation to God. He or she can ask inwardly: "How am I with God right now? What am I feeling now in the way I am with God?" If the person is able to wait for a moment perhaps some felt sense will come which can be referred to. At first, for example, it may be a sense of discomfort, and the person may only be able to say: "There's a sense that all's not right." Already some words are coming from the feeling presently there, and these words are referring back to it to say what it is. If the person continues

to pay attention to the felt phenomenon which is "religious experiencing," perhaps more words or an image will come from it. The person may say: "I feel God is disappointed in me," or perhaps there is an image of the divine countenance frowning. The person can continue to focus on "religious experiencing," and it may unfold still more with new words or images coming from it. This focusing is possible because "religious experiencing" is a primary, present, felt phenomenon which can be referred to.

James and Gendlin

Of all the contributions James's thinking makes to "religious experiencing" as a primary, present, felt phenomenon which can be referred to, the most significant is his emphasis on the primacy of "feeling" in relation to "conceptualization." James sees the essence of religion in feeling. This feeling is the "very citadel of human life."¹ It is primitive, unreflective, non-rational, subconscious and the real thing in us. It is feelings which have the depth. It is in concrete feeling that we find "fact in the making."²

¹ Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, (Briefer Version) New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1964, p. 259.

² William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, New York, Collier, 1961, p. 389.

According to James, concepts and theological formulas are only "secondary products," consequent upon and not independent of primary feeling.³ In fact, they "depend on primary feeling for their very existence."⁴

There can be no question that Gendlin's phenomenology leads him to an equal emphasis on the primacy of feeling. As we have seen, "experiencing" or "feeling" is always there for the person, to be referred to anytime. It is a kind of ur-phenomenon, a primal matrix out of which symbols and concepts as well as explicit meanings and values come. Experiencing itself is preconceptual, yet because it is implicitly meaningful, it guides conceptualization. In Gendlin's words, it is "primary in that some explicit meanings may 'fit' it and some may not."⁵ The role of symbols and concepts is to point to and form it, to capture and complete it.

While James's interest is in the person who "feels the presence of the living God,"⁶ while he is able to detail his own immediate sense of the divine, and while in the Principles he sees feeling as the "germ and starting point

3 Ibid., p. 337.

4 Ibid., p. 338.

5 Eugene T. Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, Toronto, Free Press of Glencoe, 1962, p. 46.

6 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 75.

for thought,"⁷ the primacy of religious feeling he describes in the Varieties is basically distanced. It is very content-like. He speaks of feelings which are like concepts only non-conceptual. He does not consistently see feeling as an underlying process of felt existence.⁸ It is Gendlin's "experiencing" which allows us to realize "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling" as a felt, living phenomenon of the person. "Feeling" can be defined not just as certain contents in the person, but more basically as an underlying, preconceptual, implicitly meaningful process of the person's living and interacting.

"Religious experiencing," like any other aspect of experiencing, can always be directly referred to and can, perhaps, be adequately symbolized. In other words, if the person has a felt relation to the divine, the relationship is

⁷ William James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. I, New York, Dover, 1950, p. 222.

⁸ The point I am making is that James does not consistently see feeling as something bodily felt. In speaking of James's notion of the "self," Robert R. Ehman, "William James and the Structure of the Self," in New Essays in Phenomenology: Studies in the Philosophy of Experience, Ed. by James M. Edie, Chicago, Quadrangle, 1969, p. 258, observes: "He is not concerned with the self or with conscious life primarily as a measurable and objectifiable entity; and he does not take the measured locomotion of physical objects in space as the model for the understanding of the flow of conscious life. More basic than its measurable and objective character is its flowing, streaming, felt bodily life."

implicitly meaningful and can, at least theoretically, be symbolized and made explicit. It is, of course, only the symbolization or conceptualization of "religious experiencing" which differentiates or marks out such experiencing as religious, yet what is primarily the religious is not the symbolization but the underlying, felt experiencing of the divine, which is presently there for the person. This phenomenon I am calling "religious experiencing."

b) Religious Experiencing is a Felt Relating to the Divine.

"Religious experiencing" is a relating to the divine, but a relating which exists in feeling. Both elements are important. "Religious experiencing" is a felt relating, a felt interacting, a felt response to the divine, and this felt relating is to the divine. "Religious experiencing" is the relating to God, as it presently is in its livingness.

There are ways in which people formally know that they are related to God, for example, as creatures or as redeemed, but often, it seems, people are unaware of the felt sense of how they are presently relating to God (which is also a kind of knowing). I mentioned in the Introduction the woman who said: "I know that God loves me; He loves all his creatures." Yet, what she found in her present "religious experiencing," when she was able to focus on it, was that she

had been completely abandoned by God. She felt beyond God's help, sure God did not and could not love her at all.

"Religious experiencing," as a felt relating to the divine, is unique for each person and has many moods and seasons. It may carry with it a sense of absence or a sense of presence. It may be felt as challenging, affirming, judging, or supporting. It may have a very intimate sense to it, or it may be characterized by a sense of vastness or power. It may contain a deep sense of happiness or security, and it may not. In short, the felt relating to the divine is just what it is, and it changes as the person continues to live in his or her relationship to the divine.

The divine, given in "religious experiencing," may seem to be an objective, transcendent God who acts and reacts. It may be the mystery within sacred time and space. It may be the depth revealed in an interpersonal sharing of love and hope. It may be the coalescing dynamic of a universe striving for fulfillment. The images of the divine are as varied as those who have them, from the "gentle breeze" of the prophet to the "beauty ever ancient, ever new" of Augustine, to the "present God" of Brother Lawrence, to the "Thou" of Martin Buber, the "God of love and affliction" of Simone Weil, and even the "Unstared Stare" of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Often the meaning of the divine may be difficult to conceptualize at all. It may be definitely felt, but the

words that would make it explicit are so general or so trite as to be almost wholly inadequate. It may have very much to do with a certain place, but the felt significance defies articulation. It may have something to do with a given event, season, or time of the year. It may have a lot to do with a certain community or the kind of interpersonal sharing which breaks into transcendence. If the meaning of the divine may be felt as objective, it may also be felt as situated or contextual, even though there is little vocabulary to help differentiate and symbolize its implicit meaning.

James and Gendlin

The phenomenology which allows James to see feeling as primary in religion also allows him to see feeling and its object or referent initially tied together in the one experience or event. For James, religious feeling is of the divine. There is no separation or dichotomy of feeling and its referent in actual or immediate religious experience. The religious feelings that James describes are always in terms of the "sense of presence" of the divine to which the individual responds. As we have seen, he defined the divine as "a primal reality" which the individual "feels impelled to respond to."⁹

9 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 48.

The feeling response of religion is in relation to the "divinity of the object."¹⁰ He points out: "As the sense of real presence of these objects fluctuates, so the believer alternates between warmth and coldness in his faith."¹¹

Remembering that, for James, the divine is an experiential object to be defined by each person, we can say that, for him, religious feeling is always a response to the way the divine is experienced. He insists that the divine be understood broadly as "any object that is godlike, whether it be a concrete deity or not."¹² And just as there is "no one specific and essential kind of religious object," so there is "no one elementary religious emotion, but only a common storehouse of emotions upon which religious objects may draw."¹³ Religious feelings are our normal feelings, specified in the relating to their referent.

While Gendlin does not speak of a felt relating to the divine, his thinking allows for this kind of experiencing. He shows the experiencing of the person as always situated, always in interaction with the environment. The person always feels happy because of such and such, or is hoping for

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 67.

¹² Ibid., p. 45

¹³ Ibid., p. 40.

this or that, or is angry with so and so. These feelings are the person's living in his or her situations. There is always a referent in experiencing or feeling.

In describing experiencing with respect to the person's situation, Gendlin puts a great deal of emphasis on the interpersonal response. This response provides a culture which helps to structure experiencing in a human way. Gendlin's thinking lets us see the interpersonal "other" as very important, not only for transmitting the types and nuances of religious meaning in the culture but also for sharing what personal religious meaning might surface in interpersonal experiencing.

From the findings of James, we can say that the "religious experiencing" of the individual is a response to the divine. "Religious experiencing" is an aspect of the over-all feeling process of the individual which is specified in terms of its divine referent. Much of James's description of the feeling response in religion is, however, in terms of an event. James pays little direct attention to the interpersonal dimension of this event (the suggestion coming from another, the speaker at the temperance meeting, or even from the words of Scripture). He does not focus on the broader environmental context in which the religious event is situated. He also gives little direct attention to the significance of the process leading up to and coming from the event. From

the work of Gendlin, we can say that the "religious experiencing" we are defining is always situated and environmental. There will always be a cultural matrix within which the divine is experienced, and the individual's present situation will enter into the experiencing of the divine as well. Most immediately, the interpersonal context and interpersonal responses to present felt experiencing have a marked influence on "religious experiencing" and on the way that experiencing functions in its environmental ongoingness.

What can be said, then, in summing up "religious experiencing" as a felt relating to the divine? On the one hand, we can say the "religious experiencing" of the individual is always in some relation to or in response to the divine. On the other hand, we can say this divine is to be broadly conceived as an experiential object in which the individual's cultural, situational, and interpersonal living and interacting is involved. The referent of the felt process of "religious experiencing" can be described by the word "contextual" as well as by the word "objective."

- c) Religious Experiencing is Implicitly Meaningful and Needs Symbols or Concepts to Explicate It.

There is a meaning in "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling." The experiencing is its own valuing and carries its own sense of significance. However, the meaning

there for the person in "religious experiencing" is a felt meaning, which is essentially implicit. In other words, there is a meaning, which is definitely felt but which, initially at least, may not yet be symbolically brought to awareness. Words, images, or symbols are necessary because they allow into awareness the meaning always there in "religious experiencing." The function of words and symbols is to capture or realize the meaning already there implicitly. What is primarily the religious is not the words or symbols but the underlying, felt, implicitly meaningful experiencing of the divine, the phenomenon we are calling "religious experiencing."

In a typical kind of "religious experiencing" a person may begin to focus on the felt way he or she is with God. It seems to be "something," and in a little while the person may say: "It's not clear, but it's like I'm scared of something I don't know." And then: "God's not very real to me." With further focusing on "religious experiencing" it may open up a bit more and several explicit meanings may be there. "I'm afraid of God. . . . I don't trust God. . . . It's almost like I don't trust myself." And then: "I'm afraid of God because if I really trust God that means He will ask things I don't want to do." Perhaps, with more focusing on present feeling in relation to God, some words might come to say: "It's just too hard." And then in a moment, the person

might smile and say: "I fight God instead of fighting myself." With that, there is a sigh and a sense of release, indicating that the felt meaning of "religious experiencing" is now sufficiently explicated and symbolized.

It is important to notice in this example that the implicit meaning of "religious experiencing" needs words to explicate and complete it, and yet the "religious experiencing" itself guides the choice of words which are right. The concepts touch traditional religious themes of fear and trust in God, but here they are used experientially, so as to make tracks into the rich, undifferentiated complexity of the actual situation in order to explicate it.

James and Gendlin

Although the idea that "religious experiencing" is implicitly meaningful and needs symbols or concepts to explicate it is clearly drawn from Gendlin's thinking, it is by no means foreign either in James's Varieties or in his other writings. The noetic quality of religious feeling is a theme played with many variations in the Varieties. James speaks of religious feelings as "genuine percepts of truth"¹⁴ and "fact in the making."¹⁵ He says quite clearly that

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 389.

"articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusions."¹⁶ Later in the Varieties when discussing those who have experienced self-surrender, he observes: "They know; for they have actually felt the higher powers . . ."¹⁷ Running throughout the Varieties, there is the equation of primary feeling with an equally primary sense of knowledge and truth.

In some of the more direct phenomenology of James's other writings, there surfaces an even clearer sense of inchoate knowledge residing in feeling, especially in light of the general relation of "feeling" to "conceptualization." In the Principles, for example, he calls feelings "vague cognizers of the same realities which other conscious states cognize and name exactly."¹⁸ He also sees an implicit truth in feeling when he remarks: ". . . the state of the feeling and the state of naming the feeling are continuous, and the infallibility of such joint introspective judgments is probably great."¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁸ James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 174.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 190.

Gendlin takes James's direct phenomenology a step farther. All "experiencing" is meaningful, but it is meaningful as felt. "Experiencing" is of felt, implicit meaning, which, when focused on, can open up and change as symbols or words come to say explicitly what it is. Gendlin's thinking is extremely helpful for "religious experiencing," because it allows us to see the relation to God as a present and continuing process which always has meaning. This meaning can be there for us, if through focusing we let "religious experiencing" guide the symbols and concepts which we use.

So far, in describing these first three aspects of "religious experiencing," we have said it is a primary, present, and felt phenomenon, which is a relating to the divine. This phenomenon is meaningful, but its meaning is implicit. It needs symbols or concepts to name, explicate, and carry it forward as a process.

d) Religious Experiencing is a Process Which is Able to Unfold.

Although mentioned last, this aspect of "religious experiencing" is a culmination of the others and the focal point of the thesis. "Religious experiencing" or "religious feeling" is a felt phenomenon, which is essentially a process of relating to the divine. It is process as part of the person's bodily felt livingness, which is challenged, captured,

and furthered by religious symbols, concepts, and events.

We need to be as clear as possible just how "religious-experiencing" is a process of the person. To begin with, "religious experiencing" is process as part of the over-all bodily felt livingness of the person, and in this sense it is in process with the changing events, situations, and interactions of day-to-day living. For example, a woman brought up as a child to feel God was "spying on me all the time" had a sense of God as "wrathful" and "punishing." A number of years later, and after being in counseling, she was able to focus on her present sense of God and see that it had changed. Her way of describing the new sense of God was: "I think maybe God's a swell guy." Her "religious-experiencing" was in process with the rest of her living and changing over the years.²⁰

But as we look more directly at the phenomenon of "religious experiencing" itself, what is it that makes it a process? Essentially, what constitutes it as a process is the fact that it is a flow of experiencing or feeling in relation to the divine. Realizing that this experiencing is implicitly meaningful, we can say further that "religious experiencing" is the flow of felt meaning in relation to the

²⁰ See Walter Smet, S.J., "Religious Experience in Client-Centered Therapy," in The Human Person, Magda B. Arnold and John A. Casson, S.J., Eds., New York, Ronald Press, 1954, p. 540-542.

divine. It is the changing, felt sense of relating to God, and we know it as such, because at any moment we can, as it were, dip into the flow and extract a content. We can pay attention to the present implicit meaning and with appropriate symbols or concepts see what explicit meaning or content is there. The religious content or the explicit religious meaning is itself an aspect of the process. At one moment, for example, we may conceptualize the content as a feeling of peace, at another moment, a sense of moral command, and at another moment, a sense of stiffening or being closed to God.

A still fuller sense of "religious experiencing" as process is had when we are able to focus most directly on it. In other words, we realize "religious experiencing" as a process most completely through the procedure of experiential focusing. Through focusing we can directly refer to it, thereby engendering process in the sense of allowing it to unfold. Quintessentially, then, "religious experiencing" is process as the unfolding of implicit meaning in relation to the divine. This unfolding is a furthering or deepening of the flow of felt meaning, which is an ongoing relating to God. Brought about through focusing, it is really a change in the quality or manner of felt relating. While there is no research yet to show the exact nature of this change, my own observations suggest that, on the one hand, the person feels freer, more hopeful, and more alive in relating to the divine,

and on the other hand, the divine seems to be clearer, less vague, less distant. In short, there seems to be an increasing sense of harmony or unity--which, interestingly enough, are some of the characteristics of the process of unification described by James. In a section to follow, relating "religious experiencing" to change and growth, we will see an actual example of focusing on "religious experiencing." At this point, we need only remember that, if "religious experiencing" as a process can be alive and ongoing, it can also be a flow which is stopped or blocked--much like a stream that has become dammed up.

James and Gendlin

Although the contribution James's thinking makes to an understanding of "religious experiencing" as a process is neither as immediate nor as useful as Gendlin's, it is one of pioneering insight and corroborative value, nonetheless. In the Varieties, he suggests a definite connection between religious feeling and conversion. He speaks of conversion as a process whereby "dead feelings" become "live ones."²¹ He describes self-surrender to the higher power as a "native hardness" which must "break down and liquify."²² He even

21 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 165.

22 Ibid., p. 101.

sees some direction in feeling as a process, when he remarks in the context of conversion that, when "the subconscious forces take the lead, it is the better self in posse which directs the operation."²³

In the Principles, James clearly describes feeling as a process. He relates it to the "stream of consciousness," and he speaks of feelings of relation as "an unbroken stream," saying that every image in the mind is "steeped and dyed in the free water that flows around it."²⁴ In Some Problems of Philosophy, he remarks that perceptual experience is "naturally a flux," which can never be superceded.²⁵ He also suggests that percepts and concepts function together as a process, when he says: "Percepts and concepts interpenetrate and melt together, impregnate and fertilize each other. Neither, taken alone, knows reality in its completeness. We need them both, as we need both our legs to walk with."²⁶

The contribution of Gendlin's thinking to an understanding of "religious experiencing" as a process which is able to unfold is most significant. His thinking builds on

²³ Ibid., p. 175.

²⁴ James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1, p. 255.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 468.

²⁶ William James, Some Problems of Philosophy, New York, Greenwood, 1968, p. 53.

James's, because he consistently and phenomenologically lets feeling reveal itself as "a concrete living process, a living-in-situations."²⁷ "Feeling" or "experiencing" is our existence as a felt living and interacting. One of Gendlin's most helpful findings is that experiencing or feeling is implicitly meaningful. It is the felt meaning of the way we are in our situations. It is implicit in that it is there, functioning as meaning. But often, the meaning is not yet symbolized or conceptualized, so we do not know just what it is. When a person is able to focus on "experiencing," the meaning opens up or unfolds, and words or symbols come to explicate it and say what it is. This focusing, with its four phases, allows implicit meaning to unfold and become explicated, so as to carry the experiencing forward as a process..

With the detailing of these four aspects of "religious experiencing" and the way they flow from the thinking of James and Gendlin, we have a basic description of the process understanding of religious experience we have been working toward. As James would phrase it, we have "rehabilitated" the notion of religious feeling by seeing it as a primary, present phenomenon, which is essentially the flow of felt meaning in relation to the divine. Through focusing, this

²⁷ Eugene T. Gendlin, "Experiential Explication and Truth," in Journal of Existentialism, Vol. 6, No. 22, Winter 1965-66, p. 139.

felt meaning becomes explicit and "religious experiencing" unfolds and is carried forward as an ongoing process.

Two related points should be kept in mind with the articulation of "religious experiencing" through James and Gendlin. The first point is that, although I have introduced Gendlin's thought as a way of achieving some of the things James wanted to do but could not, I feel that in many ways the contributions of each man to a process understanding of religious experience are complementary. The main contribution of James to a process understanding of religious experience is that he sees religion rooted in individual feeling. The main contribution of Gendlin to a process understanding of religious experience is that he sees feeling as an ongoing, situated, interpersonal process. The common, operative, integrative phenomenon that both focus on is "feeling." As we have seen, in the Varieties, James talks of this feeling basically in terms of contents in respect to an experienced religious object or referent, while Gendlin talks of feeling as an ongoing process of therapeutic change and growth. Their basically phenomenological approach to "feeling," however, allows for a creative interplay in their thinking, as it can be brought to bear on "religious experiencing."

The second point to be made is that, while I am drawing on the resources in the thinking of James and Gendlin to articulate "religious experiencing" as an aspect of the

experiencing process of the individual, my primary concern is not to show that their thinking is compatible or complementary. My primary concern is to use their thinking to describe an actual phenomenon which is "in" or "of" the person. In other words, at the heart of the process understanding of religious experience is a living, concrete, observable phenomenon, which, as an aspect of the person's over-all experiencing, can be referred to and symbolized or conceptualized religiously. It is this phenomenon that I am calling "religious experiencing," and it is the locating and describing of "religious experiencing" that I feel has so much value for religious educators, pastoral counselors, spiritual directors, and therapists.

2. Religious Experiencing in Light of the Initial Questions and Issues in Religious Experience.

Before we move on to the implications of "religious experiencing" for the growth of the person and for an understanding of experiential religion, it may be helpful to get additional perspective on this phenomenon by seeing it in light of the questions and issues raised in Chapter I.

The question Marcel's thinking raised for me, as I contemplated religious experience as a process, is:

Can I find a way of working with religious experience that will respect its immediacy and yet be adequate as reflection? And if for many people religious experience is a very meaningful and integrative aspect of life, can I find a way of articulating it as it is actually lived, a way of articulating which

will unify, yet one that does not distort or claim too much?

The "religious experiencing" just described provides a very thorough and useful response to this question. When we directly refer to "religious experiencing," we are touching it in its immediacy because we are paying attention to its presently felt aliveness in us. At the same time, when we directly refer to it we are, in effect, reflecting on it, that is, we are bending back on it, as it were, to capture and explicate it. In addition, focusing on "religious experiencing" is a way of allowing symbols and concepts to arise which are the articulation of the way religious experience is presently lived in the person. The articulation of the experience comes from the continuous experiencing of the person, and this articulation completes or unifies the experience. There is no danger of the words or concepts claiming too much or distorting, as long as they are used experientially.

In light of the thrust of this thesis, the question that came out of Tillich is aimed at a better understanding of the experiencing subject and religious "content."

How can the experiencing subject be seen as an integral part of religious experience? And, if the experiencing subject is taken seriously as part of religious experience, what does this do for the way the contents of that experience can be understood?

The phenomenon of "religious experiencing" shows clearly that the experiencing subject is the concrete feeling process of religious experience. "Religious experiencing" is

the primal feeling process out of which contents arise; contents are process aspects. There simply are no contents apart from someone's experiencing process.

The question of the content of a given religious tradition in relation to an individual's religious experiencing might be resolved, if the religious tradition could be understood as a reservoir of "experienceables," that is, as a collection of different ways the divine has been experienced within the tradition as a whole. In the Christian tradition, for example, the writings of St. Paul, St. John, and St. Matthew all reflect ways in which Christ has been experienced. While the hammering of these experiences of Christ into clear dogmatic formulation may have had definite benefits in terms of community identity and solidarity, such dogmatic formulations can also have the effect of making a given individual's personal experiencing of the Christ-event more difficult. Often, in the way that dogmatic formulations are understood the original experiential dimension of the divine becomes insignificant and inaccessible. Perhaps, if the Scriptures are seen primarily as ways in which God has been experienced, then they will be of more experiential value to the contemporary person trying to understand his own felt relation to God.

The question that came from my reflection on the thought of Carl Rogers is:

If a person's religion is part of his experience, in what ways is it or can it be part of the growth of personality?

The response to this question suggests by "religious experiencing" is that, if personality is understood as a process of experiencing, then to the extent that religious symbols and events can symbolize experiencing, to that extent they further the growth of personality. The question of growth in relation to the process of "religious experiencing" will be taken up in the next section of this chapter. I would only like to point out here that there seem to be two ways of understanding personality growth in Rogers' thought. One way is to read Rogers as an ideology in which his own humanistic beliefs in the person and the person's functioning are set forth. A second way is to read Rogers as describing a process of human growth and development which is open to every kind of experience. If Rogers is read in this second way-- and this is the way I read him--then, for the religious person, it will be important that religious experience be understood as experience and, therefore, as related to the congruent functioning of personality and personality growth.

The phenomenon of "religious experiencing" also strikes a responsive chord with the three issues in psychology of religion raised in Chapter I. The issue of "Personal Experience Influencing the Methodology in Religious Experience" is clarified by Gendlin's finding that the words we use, the



concepts we make, must be rooted in preconceptual feeling, if they are to be personally meaningful. Concepts and systems of concepts have, of course, a more public and less "owned" factual and logical meaning, but a given writer tends to write out of his own experience, which means, in Gendlin's terms, that he tends to explicate his own implicitly meaningful experiencing. In other words, a writer's methodology and his formal approach to the phenomenon of religious experience tend to be an explication of his own "religious experiencing" or of his empathic understanding of another's experiencing, all this in dialogue with the way "facts" are construed by others and in light of the nuances of logic that reside in the different communities in which he dialogues.

To say that a writer tends to write out of his own experience is to say that his own experiencing, that is, the manner of that experiencing along with its implicit meanings, must be understood as an integral part of his or her systematic approach to the psychology of religion. Leuba and Freud wrote out of a personal experiencing process which did not include a felt relating to the divine. From an experiential point of view, it would be more accurate to label their approach a "psychology of non-religion." I do not mean to denigrate some of their very valuable insights as to how religion functions in the person. I do mean to point out that a writer cannot prescind from his own personal experience in

writing about religious experience.

The process of "religious experiencing" throws some light on the whole issue of religious experience and its interpretation, which surfaces in the work of Leuba and Freud. Interpretation need not be seen as a cognitive overlay on what is basically dumb experience. "Religious experiencing" is itself implicitly meaningful, so what is called interpretation is better understood, as Gendlin points out, as conceptualization coming from this implicit meaning.²⁸ John Smith observes that interpretation is usually seen as moving away from the actual religious experience.²⁹ Gendlin's thinking gives us an opportunity to reverse the direction. Interpretation can now be seen as a way of moving into "religious experiencing" to explicate and integrate the implicit meaning already there.

The issue of "The Subject-Object Dichotomy in Religious Experience" also finds an answer in the process understanding of religious experience just described. "Religious experiencing" is not just a psychic phenomenon. There is implicit religious meaning within it, which is a felt relating to the

²⁸ See Eugene T. Gendlin, "The Experiential Response," in The Use of Interpretation in Treatment: Technique and Art, Ed. by Emanuel F. Hammer, New York, Grune and Stratton, 1968, p. 208-227.

²⁹ John E. Smith, "In What Sense Can We Speak of Experiencing God?" in Journal of Religion, Vol. 50, No. 3, July 1970, p. 241.

divine. "Religious experiencing" is neither an objective nor a subjective entity. It is essentially the felt interacting of the person in relation to God. When "religious experiencing" is understood as a process, its reduction into a static subjective or objective entity is hard to conceive. "Religious experiencing," as process, helps us see that it makes little sense to speak of religious "objects" or "contents," as if they were not part of the experiencing process. In fact, in directly referring to "religious experiencing," these "objects" and "contents" are revealed as process aspects.

The concern for "The Role of Feeling in Religious Experience" is, of course, the issue that is most directly reflected in the process understanding of religious experience which I am describing. In effect, the "religious experiencing" arrived at through James and Gendlin is a new understanding of the role of feeling in religious experience.

Many elements in Schleiermacher's and Otto's thinking make a definite contribution to a phenomenology of feeling in religion: its primary character; the fact that it is irreducible and non-rational; the fact that it is a living phenomenon. James's thinking consolidates many of these elements, and yet it reveals feeling as it actually exists in a variety of individuals. James has no essential phenomenology of religious feeling. James also shows that feeling is real, that it is a response to the divine, and that there is a certain knowledge

and truth in it on which concepts depend.

Gendlin's thinking takes the "feeling" in James a step closer by showing that this feeling is essentially the living process of a person. Feeling is existence as lived; it is an interacting, a phenomenon that as focused on is really an "inside-outside." Gendlin's thinking also allows us to see that concepts complete and carry forward religious feeling. Religious concepts and symbols are not unimportant, and neither are they independent. They function in explicating feeling so that it can be brought to awareness and made ungoing.

As it contributes to "religious experiencing," Gendlin's thinking also allows us to see that religious feeling is an interpersonal phenomenon and that the interpersonal response, much like the "evoking" of Schleiermacher and Otto, can have a very profound effect in making "religious experiencing" explicit for an individual so as to carry it forward as a felt response to the divine. In short, the "religious experiencing" described in the previous section is a very concrete, phenomenological, therapeutic, and useable definition of the role of feeling in religion.

3) Religious Experiencing and Growth.

The possibility of being able to speak in a foundational way of "religious experiencing" in relation to growth lies in the fact that the "religious experiencing" we have defined is an aspect of the concrete experiencing process of the individual and in the fact that this experiencing process, when accurately and continuously symbolized, is a growth process. The first thing to be said, then, of "religious experiencing" in relation to growth is that, when ongoing, it is a growth process. If certain religious words or symbols or events can interact with experiencing in such a way as to carry forward the experiencing process, then the individual is growing.

It should be quickly pointed out that several things are not being said here. First, the religious concepts or symbols or events are not of themselves criteria for growth. Growth takes place only when these concepts or symbols or events can interact with experiencing so as to complete that experiencing and carry it forward in a bodily felt way. Second, religious growth would seem to be one aspect of growth, even though as James has said, experience of the divine or surrender to the higher power seems to provide for many the felt happiness, assurance, and oneness that do not seem easily duplicated by other kinds of experiencing. Third, "religious" growth is not being compared to or paralleled

with "human" growth. If we take the experiencing process of the individual as foundational, as an ur-phenomenon, then using the terms "religious" or "human" are just different ways of specifying or differentiating this process. "Religious" growth is not to be defined in opposition to "human" growth, nor is "human" growth to be defined in opposition to "religious" growth. Whatever symbols, concepts, events, or images can interact with experiencing so as to carry it forward, that is a growth process. If religious symbols and events can do this, then it makes sense to speak of religious growth or of growth in terms of "religious experiencing."

The work of James, in conjunction with that of Gendlin, suggests not only that "religious experiencing" is a concrete process of growth when in fact this experiencing is ongoing, but also that this growth is in response to the "divine" or "God," or the "higher power." "Religious experiencing" is, as we have seen, a relating to the divine; it is an interacting with the divine as an aspect of one's situation or environment.

Often, growth in relation to the divine is understood as a growth in the meaning of the divine.³⁰ It seems to me, however, that at the heart of the changing meaning of the

³⁰ See, for example, Rodney Stark, "A Taxonomy of Religious Experience," in Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 5, No. 1, October 1965, p. 97-116.

divine is a felt experiencing, which is continuously interacting and which functions as implicit meaning. For growth in respect to "religious experiencing," it is important that, when necessary, the implicit meanings in the interacting with the divine be accurately symbolized, so that the meaning can become explicit and so that the felt relationship can itself be carried forward and be ongoing. For most individuals, the meaning of the divine comes from the religious tradition in which they were raised. What I am suggesting here is that in response to the tradition, each person has his or her own / implicitly felt religious meanings, and it is these implicitly felt religious meanings which are part of experiencing and which can be described in terms of their manner and ongoingness.

If "religious experiencing," as ongoing, is a process of growth, then it is easy to see that when the process is not ongoing there is no growth. If the manner of "religious experiencing" may be alive, open, fresh in the relation to the divine, the manner may also be narrowed, blocked, or stopped. Ongoing "religious experiencing" exists when the felt meaning of that experiencing functions implicitly and is able to be symbolized and conceptualized. Exactly what concepts and symbols will be used to explicate presently felt and alive "religious experiencing" will depend on the individual, the tradition he has been raised in, and the situations

and events--religious and otherwise--he has experienced. Most important for growth, however, will be his own ability to directly refer to his own present "religious experiencing" and the interpersonal responses from others which will help in that focusing, so that just the right symbolization can be found which can have an experiential effect and carry the experiencing process forward. As we will see in the next section of this chapter, religion is rarely construed in terms of the ongoingness of the implicitly felt religious meaning in the individual, and likewise the religious concepts that we most often use are not a way of explicating presently felt "religious experiencing" but of describing an "object" God. Still, when religious concepts and symbols come to be used experientially, then we are able to speak of the ongoingness of "religious experiencing" as a process of growth.

The "religious experiencing" which is not ongoing is a different matter. There are any number of ways of explaining why an individual's "religious experiencing" may not be ongoing. One person, perhaps, has come to a situation in his relation to God in which there is no way to move. There is a religious situation which seems unsolvable, and the person gets blocked in relating to God because of this situation.³¹

³¹ I am thinking here both of an understanding of God in terms of demands that do not seem realizable and of the sense of sin as an "obstacle" in relation to God.

For another person, the need for security or stability is such that a fixed "religious experiencing" is the only anchor in a sea of change. For another person, "religious experiencing" may be blocked, because God is so identified by a primitive conceptualization that the concepts effectively exclude the possibility of any real experiencing.³² For another person, the experiencing of God may have been connected, in Roger's terms, with the need for "positive regard" from others; the person accepts God in order to be accepted by others, but there is no experiential base to this acceptance of God. For another person religion has been presented as in no way connected with life so that his "religious experiencing" is not in dialogue with the rest of his experiencing process. For another person the interpersonal relationships he has are so impoverished that his understanding of the divine is almost a function of his own lack of identity or self-esteem; the blocked experiencing in the other areas of his life hamper his "religious experiencing" as well. In short, there are any number of possible explanations of stopped or blocked "religious experiencing."

32 I am thinking here of anthropomorphism, which, along with rationalism and authoritarianism, is seen as one of three "stumbling blocks" that help to keep religious feeling repressed, according to Viktor Frankl, The Will To Meaning, New York, New American Library, 1969, p. 149.

One of the especially useful implications of Gendlin's thinking is that in some or all of these types of "religious experiencing"--some of which could be called neurotic or perhaps psychotic--a process of change and growth and ongoingness may be able to be brought about through focusing with the help of a therapeutic other, who is comfortable with "religious experiencing."

A good example of how blocked "religious experiencing" can change and become ongoing is from a focusing session with a religious sister, who finds "something in the way" in her relationship with God.³³ The following is a transcript of the session.³⁴

- J Let yourself get comfortable, breathe a bit . . . and gently ask yourself: How am I with God right now? What's it like between me and God right now? And don't answer, but wait and see if some kind of feeling comes to say how it is between you and God right now. . . . And see if some feeling won't come . . . some sense of what it's like between you and God. . . . And if a lot of words come, see if you can't get down to the feeling level of just how you are right now with God. . . . And don't make it be anything. Just let yourself get some felt sense of how you are with God. Let the feeling come, and be gentle with it. . . .
- R It's like there's a knot in my stomach.

33 This session took place during a religious retreat in the Spring of 1979. It is recounted with permission.

34 The most important thing in focusing is to help the person stay with present feeling or experiencing. I know the sister in this session, and I do a lot of talking only because it seems to facilitate the process. It should also be mentioned that, since experiencing is bodily felt, it can be observed. I can see tightness, for example, and respond to it.

- J Um, so there's a knot there in your stomach, that's what it's like. . . . Let yourself pay attention to the knot, and just be there with that. . . . and see what it all feels like, that knot in your stomach. . . . And don't analyze it. Just let yourself be with the feeling that's there. . . .
- R It's a very tense feeling.
- J It's very tense. Stay with that. Stay with that tense feeling. . . . that knot there in your stomach, and just let it be there. . . . and be friendly to it and welcome it. . . . Just let yourself stay with the feeling, and don't talk to it. And try not to fight it. . . . Just let it be there. . . . Just let yourself stay there. . . .
- R It's like the tenseness is spreading. It's more than just in the stomach.
- J OK. . . the tenseness is spreading and it feels like more than just a knot. Stay with that. Stay with that feeling that you have there very much in your body. . . . And be gentle with it, and just let yourself feel it. . . .
- R It's hard to be gentle with the tenseness.
- J Let it be there. . . . and see if you can be gentle. . . . Just let yourself stay with the feeling. And if you find that there's a word that comes, or an image, or something to say what that's like, then see what that is. . . . but stay with the feeling that's there. . . .
- R It's like a frightened feeling. . . . I can feel it in my shoulders. . . . definitely.
- J So it's a frightened feeling. It's the kind of feeling you can feel yourself tensing up. Stay with that. Stay with that feeling just the way it is for you. . . . And try not to analyze it, and try not to fight it. Just let it be there for you the way it seems to be. . . .
- R It's like I'm holding on to something and can't let go..
- J There's something you're holding on to and you can't let go. . . . Stay with that. . . . (inaudible). See if you can't get some sense of what it is there you're holding on to and you can't let go. . . . Just let yourself be with it. . . . Stay with the feeling that's there. . . .
- R It's kind of like I want God on my terms and not his.
- J It's kind of like you want God on your terms and not his. Let yourself feel it. Stay with the feeling that's there.

- R I'm still frightened.
- J It's not quite right, there's still something wrong. Be patient with it. Stay with that that's not quite right. There's still something wrong Stay with the sense that there's still something wrong. See what that is. . . . And don't figure it out. Let yourself get the feel of it, the feel of what that is that still, still something wrong.
- R I don't, I don't feel as tense, but I don't feel right.
- J It's not as tense, but it's still not quite right. Something's there. There's part of it, but there's the sense it's not quite the whole thing. Something's still not right. . . .
- R It's like if, if I let go, I'll get hurt.
- J Um hm, OK, it's like if I let go, I'll get hurt Stay with the feeling that you have there
- R It's kind of hard not to try to figure out how I'll get hurt.
- J Um, not to figure out the feeling that says: "I'll get hurt." (inaudible) Let yourself stay with that feeling (inaudible).
- R And now it's coming back again.
- J Um, now it's coming back. . . . Let yourself pay attention to it . . . just be with it. . . . And try not to fight it . . . just be with it. . . .
- R The feeling's changing (inaudible).
- J Uh, the feeling is changing. . . . Let yourself be with whatever's there. Don't make it do anything and try not to make it be anything. Just be with what's there for you.
- R Like there's something telling me to let go, but I'm not sure . . . what. . . .
- J So a sense there there's something telling you to let go, but you're not sure what it is. . . . Stay with the feeling that's there. Try not to figure it out, but just stay with the feeling that you have. . . . Let it tell you. . . .
- R Some of the tenseness is going. . . . It's my own will and not his (inaudible).
- J It's your own will and not his (inaudible), um, stay with that (inaudible).
- R (relaxing and smiling) Now, I feel good.
- J And now you feel good. There's a sense there that it's my own will and not his. . . .
- R That's it.
- J That's it.
- R Um, hm . . . that's good.

J You sense that?

R Um hm.

This example illustrates "religious experiencing" as an aspect of the person's present felt experiencing process. Through "focusing" on this presently felt "religious experiencing," the implicit meaning there is able to change and unfold and to be symbolized in awareness ("It's my own will and not his"). This aspect of her experiencing is able to be conceptualized, made explicit, and carried forward. There is a felt change in her living relationship to God, which, in effect, is growth in her "religious experiencing."

In the process of "religious experiencing," any number of symbols and concepts can be used, but only as they can interact in the present moment with the person's experiencing. These concepts and symbols need not be constantly changing. The concepts themselves may be the ones used by the person all along, but through focusing the felt meaning of these concepts may change. There will, perhaps, be a deeper meaning in the concepts, reflecting a changed manner of experiencing in the person. James Tracy suggests this kind of change when he says:

"I believe Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God" uttered by me here and now means much more than the same utterance ten years ago. Though the words remain identical, their meaning for me has deepened and broadened. What evolves, then, is not the proposition but the individual person pronouncing the

proposition.³⁵

Speaking within the context of religious maturity, Orlo Strunk makes much the same point when he says: "Perhaps the beliefs may now be stated in terms exactly as they were communicated to us in childhood, but now the meanings they have are far richer and have taken on an added dimension."³⁶

The way I understand Strunk's observation is not simply that the meanings are richer and with added dimension, but that the underlying, implicitly felt "religious experiencing" has been able to flow and unfold over the years--no doubt with the help of others in the congregation. The person's growing in a felt relating to the divine gives new depth to meaning, even though this meaning may be expressed in explicit beliefs and symbols, which are verbally the same as before.

One question which arises in relation to the change brought about in "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling" in an interpersonal setting is: Does interpersonal experiencing engender "religious experiencing"? One writer who sees a positive, and perhaps causal, relation between an

³⁵ James J. Tracy, "Faith and Growth: A Psychology of Faith," in Insight, Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter 1967, p. 16.

³⁶ Orlo Strunk, Jr., Mature Religion: A Psychological Study, New York, Abingdon, 1965, p. 125.

interpersonal experiencing process and "religious experiencing" is James V. Clark. He insists in "Toward a Theory and Practice of Religious Experiencing"³⁷ that sensitivity training is the most religious enterprise he knows. He explains:

Placed in the environment of one of these groups, people seem, in their own ways, to go through the development of a religion. Although the revelations and the symbols used in each individual's faith and witnessing have their own unique content for each person, the process each person goes through appears similar to the development of any religion.³⁸
(Emphasis mine)

To point out the way this religious process is engendered, Clark quotes Buber who says that it is "from one man to another that the heavenly bread of self being is passed."³⁹ The central point Clark makes in the article is that it is out of interpersonal experiencing that religious elements are experienced:

. . . the mutually revelatory relation is the medium in which all the central elements of religious experience emerge almost at once. These elements are a revelatory experience, the development of transcendent values such that the person values facing toward the content of his revelation, faith in Tillich's sense of developing an internal ultimate concern with the, external ultimate seen only in symbols, and witnessing, by which I mean acting--moving toward or in some way expressing one's

³⁷ James V. Clark, "Toward A Theory and Practice of Religious Experiencing," in Challenges of Humanistic Psychology, ed. by James F.T. Bugental, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967, p. 253-258.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 255.

ultimate concern.⁴⁰

The process Clark is describing here is very similar to the process of experiencing with the interpersonal other as described by Gendlin. The emergence of "religious experiencing" seems to be attributable to the kind of experiencing facilitated by the sensitivity trainer. One of the major influences Clark sees in bringing about this kind of process is "the conviction and skill of the professional in designing the experience and in helping it unfold."⁴¹

The dynamic of the interaction brought about by the religious other is described by Clark in the following way:

To create God's presence is a joy and a duty of each human being. . . . It is a joy and duty because we are doing what we need to do for our own creation. When man avoids experiencing himself as a creator, he sins against his own basic nature, and in that sense it is his duty to place himself in relation to the other who is presenting himself. Certainly central points of Buber are that God presents himself through the other and that it takes "an I to create a Thou. When another "secretly and bashfully watches for a silent Yes" and when we move toward him and respond to him with our "I-ness," we create him. And if God is presenting Himself through the human other, we create Him.⁴²

Quite obviously Clark is drawing from his own experience in describing interpersonal experiencing as a process of religious growth. Whether this process is therapeutic,

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 255-256.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 254.

⁴² Ibid., p. 257. The quote is from Martin Buber, The Knowledge of Man, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1965, p. 71.

strictly speaking, or whether "religious experiencing" simply flows out of the depth of the interpersonal encounter, there is no doubt that Clark is proposing an evolution or direction toward "religious experiencing," which seems to arise from within the process of interpersonal experiencing, a direction which seems to be as well a process of transcendent valuing.

The "religious experiencing" and its attendant transcendent valuing that arises out of deep interpersonal experiencing needs symbolization, and Clark is insistent that this symbolization come from the experiencing, even though this symbolization may be part of a religious tradition. Using the language of Tillich, Clark observes:

For a person unconditionally to center himself toward the ultimate, its symbols must be unreservedly his own. Regardless of its origin, he must have taken it utterly and completely into himself, as did the group members who felt the hands of Christ and who saw the face of Buddha and "Eli." Because the symbols of religious organization are not our own originally, we are quite correct (in a developmental sense) to reject them. And most intellectuals and professionals have. Indeed it appears that most people have. But we are left needing an experience in which we can develop our own symbols. It may well be that later on we will see in culturally more widespread symbols, such as that of Christ on the cross, even deeper and more meaningful expressions of the object of our ultimate concern.⁴³ (Emphasis mine)

Other writers have come to similar conclusions about the relation of group experience to religious

⁴³ Clark, "Toward a Theory and Practice of Religious Experiencing," p. 257.

experience.⁴⁴ Clark's findings are viewed here at some length, because the therapeutic context of his descriptions is very close to Gendlin's "experiencing," because he includes in his own way the basic characteristics of "religious experiencing" presented in the first section of this chapter, and because he shows that interpersonal experiencing does seem to engender "religious experiencing" in the person.

A second question arises in the context of "religious experiencing" in relation to growth, a question which comes from James's description of the "best fruits" of religious experience, that is, the feelings resulting from conversion and the feelings associated with saintliness. The question is: Can we say that "religious experiencing," as ongoing, has a direction? Should the process produce feelings of peace, happiness, oneness, security, etc.? In response to this question I feel that in light of the many similarities in James's and Gendlin's description of feeling as a process, a preliminary answer would seem to be that there is a direction to "religious experiencing." Certainly, if we take James's description of the feelings associated with what he sees as

44 See Thomas C. Oden, The Intensive Group Experience: The New Pietism, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1972, p. 189. See also Joseph Havens, "Religious Awareness and Small Groups: Warmth versus Enlightenment," in The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology, ed. by Peter Homans, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 263-284.

the growth process of conversion and if we translate these feelings into a manner of experiencing from which, as "contents," these feelings come, then "religious experiencing" seems to have a certain direction.

This question of the direction of "religious experiencing" as a continuous, ongoing process of growth is ultimately an experiential one. A number of factors must be taken into account, not the least of which are the nature of the divine which the person interacts with and the kinds of interpersonal experiencing which may influence the person's "religious experiencing." My main purpose in relating "religious experiencing" to a process of growth is:

(1) to show that "religious experiencing" as an ongoing process of the person is a growth process, and

(2) to indicate that interpersonal experiencing, especially when the interpersonal other is open to "religious experiencing," can engender a person's felt relating to the divine.

4. A Basic Description of Experiential Religion

In this last section of the chapter, we realize some further explication and elaboration of "religious experiencing" by spelling out a notion of "experiential religion." We shift our perspective on "religious experiencing" from its implications for change and growth to its implications for

the way religion itself might be understood.

Every so often there is a call for a return to experience in religion. There is demand for a kind of correction factor for a religion that has become too abstract, too intellectual, too caught up with systems and concepts, too far removed from the way religious people actually seem to live and construe their feelings in relation to the divine. Writing within an ecclesial context, Paul Rowntree Clifford puts the issue this way:

The fact is that most people do not feel that the church really meets them in either its teaching or its ritual. They have a sense of a great hiatus which is at a far deeper level than that of the intellect; it is at the very wellsprings of human life where emotions rule to a degree that most of us simply have not measured. For if emotional response is not evoked by the way in which the faith is articulated, we can be sure that the latter is not being related to any profound intuitive awareness. What is commonplace in psychology has hardly come to the surface in ecclesiastical circles.⁴⁵

From within the same ecclesial context, Morton Kelsey focuses specifically on the need for personal experience:

. . . this new generation, both young and old, are not satisfied with authority; they want experiences of God to verify the theology and the dogma. And this, as we shall see, is exactly what the modern church and modern theology are short on, even hostile to.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Paul Rowntree Clifford, "The Place of Feeling in Religious Awareness," in New Theology No. 7: The Recovery of Transcendence, ed. by Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, Macmillan, 1970, p. 52.

⁴⁶ Morton Kelsey, Encounter With God: A Theology of Christian Experience, Minneapolis, Bethany Fellowship, 1972, p. 24-25.

Speaking in a more psychological context and approaching religion from the point of view of the power of religious symbols as experienced, Ira Progoff makes much the same point when he says: "It is not that the insights of traditional religion are not true; it is simply that their relevance and meaningfulness is not felt strongly enough in the modern situation of life to be psychologically effective."⁴⁷ (Emphasis mine)

In response to this gap between feeling and formal religion let us explore a notion of "experiential religion" which flows directly from the "religious experiencing" we have described. There are three statements which basically characterize an experientially understood religion. The first statement, "Experiential religion does not focus on God but on the experiencing of God," is crucial for the relation of personal experience to the meaning of religion. The second statement is "Experiential religion sees religious concepts, symbols, beliefs, and values only as they can interact with the experiencing process." With this statement, we see how experiential religion must arise out of a person's experiencing process. The last statement characterizing experiential religion is "Experiential religion is engendered by interpersonal experiencing and can be seen as a manner of

⁴⁷ Ira Progoff, The Symbolic and the Real, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1973, p. 14.

experiencing." Here we see religion as related to an interpersonal process which is inherently growthful. Let us look more closely at these statements, as we round out the chapter.

- a) Experiential religion does not focus on God but on the experiencing of God.

If both James and Gendlin are right in their assertions regarding the primacy of feeling in relation to conceptualization, then it would seem that to speak of God in a personal way an individual must use words directly related to the feeling process. In "religious experiencing" a person will, of course, reflect his culture and the collective experiencing of those with whom he shares, yet the concepts he uses that have personal meaning will also come from his own experiencing. To put the matter succinctly, to speak personally about the divine is to speak out of one's own "religious experiencing."

The point being made is that in experiential religion the focus is on religious feeling or the experiencing of God and not simply on the more "objective" divine entity that may be revealed in that experiencing. The fact is that the substance of religion is the experiencing of the divine. Yet, with the influence of the "empirical paradigm," we tend to see religion as simply being about God, forgetting we are actually considering God as experienced by someone. Our religious language has been understood to be saying what God is rather than how God is experienced.

One of the most important implications of "religious experiencing" is that there is a basic distinction to be made between experiential and non-experiential religion. In experiential religion, the divine would always be seen as arising out of an experiencing process, while in non-experiential religion the focus would be an entitative one on God or the divine, without reference to anyone's experiencing process. Either approach to religion is possible; religious concepts and symbols can be used in the service of either experiential or non-experiential religion. At issue, however, is the meaning of these concepts and symbols. Langdon Gilkey characterizes the issue this way:

. . . theological symbols, explicated without reference to ordinary experience, have meaning only "eidetically" in terms of their inherent structures or intentional meaning. They do not have religious meaning for us, though we who study them may realize emphatically that they have had some such meaning for others. (. . .) The meanings of religious symbols for others are available to us through a careful study of religions, Biblical or otherwise, but one must not confuse an understanding of their eidetic meanings with the religious meaning for us of these symbols in our contemporary situation. That meaning is possible only when these symbols are united to the experiences in our actual, contemporary life which they symbolize. . . .⁴⁸

Although the context in which Gilkey is writing is more social than individual and although his terminology is slightly different from that of Gendlin, he is touching on

⁴⁸ Langdon Gilkey, "The Problem of God: A Programmatic Essay," in Traces of God in a Secular Culture, ed., by George F. McLean, O.M.I., New York, Alba House, 1973, p. 18.

Gendlin's understanding of experiential meaning, that is, the meaning that comes from being able to symbolize felt, implicitly meaningful experiencing. It is possible, as Gilkey indicates, to speak of the divine in a basically logical or factual way but without there being any experiential meaning in such language for the individual. In experiential religion the religious meaning for the person is the primary concern. Logical and factual religious meanings are not superceded, but ultimately their importance lies in the ways they can be related to or enter into the person's "religious experiencing."

Logical and factual religious meanings are dependent in the last analysis on experiential religious meaning. While it is true that religions may be approached analytically as a kind of conceptual game or historically as an homogenous group of revelatory facts, most religions are ultimately rooted in terms of someone's lived experience, an experience which is to make a difference in the hearers or followers. Often, the experiential understanding of religion becomes submerged in favor of a non-experiential understanding which is easier to objectify, easier to conceptualize, easier to systematize. The result is often a mixture in the person of experiential and non-experiential elements, a mixture which can easily distort "religious experiencing" in two related ways: process-skipping and ontologizing.

One phenomenon that clearly inhibits the individual process of "religious experiencing" is what can be called process-skipping. It happens this way. From some direct experiencing of the divine a person develops a number of assumptions and other characteristics of the divine on the basis of logical or factual inference. Eventually, the original "religious experiencing" is not focused on in a way that it might deepen, unfold, and be carried forward as a process. Rather, the person is left with a number of religious concepts and symbols and perhaps a conceptual religious system, but these concepts are no longer a part of his own "religious experiencing." The conceptualization is of God, but it is not the person's own conceptualization of God. In other words, a non-experiential approach to religion can easily separate God from the person's experiencing process. As the result of such an approach, "religious experiencing" is seen as unrelated to the development of personality, and religion is seen as having no intrinsic relation to the growth of the person.

A second phenomenon that tends to restrict "religious experiencing" is ontologizing. When the divine and not the experiencing of the divine is the focus of religion, it seems that any number of schemata are discovered to figure out what, or whether, or how this "entity" is, if it is an "entity" at all. Religion becomes a branch of ontology,

while all the time how God is given in experiencing or the manner of this experiencing of the divine is seen as insignificant and "merely subjective." Ontologizing comes about by forgetting the experiencing subject. Like process-skipping, ontologizing is time-honored and, as James would say, "has the prestige," but its effect on "religious experiencing" is to stifle the individual's experiencing process while at the same time making the focus of religion some kind of "object" or "being," which is cut off from the process out of which it originally emerged.

If the intrinsic connection between "religious experiencing" and growth, which was presented in the previous section of the chapter, seems novel or difficult to accept, perhaps much of the confusion comes from a failure to make the basic distinction between experiential and non-experiential religion. Experiential religion is a process of personal growth. Non-experiential religion has no necessary connection with personal growth and tends, in fact, to side-track or stifle "religious experiencing." It may seem to be a simple thing, but it makes a great deal of difference in religion whether one focuses on an experiencing of the divine or just on the divine.



- b) Experiential religion sees religious concepts, symbols, beliefs, and values only as they can interact with the experiencing process.

In trying to put his finger on the central difficulty in the present understanding of religion, Paul Rowntree.

Clifford observes:

It is not a question, as is still commonly supposed, of translating the faith into language which is more intelligible to ordinary people. The problem is much more complex than that. It is how to relate the Gospel to human feeling, to that all pervasive substratum of awareness to which I have drawn attention. Until we realize that all attempts to speak to the intellect which do not grapple with underlying feelings will fail, we shall not make any real progress.⁴⁹

An experiential religion would insist that religious concepts, symbols, beliefs, and values always be understood in relation to someone's experiencing process. The function of these various "contents" would be either to explicate an individual's concrete, implicitly meaningful religious experiencing or to evoke the "religious experiencing" of an individual, much in the way Rudolf Otto suggested.⁵⁰ In either case, the concepts, symbols, beliefs, and values will not be seen to have a life of their own apart from an actual experiencing process.

⁴⁹ Clifford, "The Place of Feeling in Religious Awareness," p. 52.

⁵⁰ Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. by John W. Harvey, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 6.

Not to see these religious "contents" as aspects of "religious experiencing" would be, in Whitehead's phrase, to suffer the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. The reality, as James has shown, is not in the religious concepts and beliefs, but in the more primary religious feeling, which underlies them. The function of these "contents" is precisely to symbolize this more primary feeling, to capture it, to complete it, and to carry it forward as a process.

The emphasis in experiential religion is on the experiencing process, which is the individual. To emphasize the symbols at the expense of this process is to distort the reality of the primary experience and to make light of the felt meaning, which is the only basis on which the symbols themselves can function experientially and can aid in the ongoing growth and development of the individual. Gendlin is himself insistent on the tie between religion and felt meaning as well as on the dependent role of symbolization, when he observes:

Religious services, strong emotions, our acquaintance with persons--these are all cases where meaning certainly is experienced, but because our verbal symbols usually are inadequate, we are aware strongly of felt meaning. At least some of this meaning usually can be explicated in terms of verbal symbols. Whether so explicated or not, felt meaning is experienced in these cases and we may easily demonstrate its presence to ourselves.⁵¹

⁵¹ Gendlin, Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning, p. 70-71.

The importance of the experiencing process in relation to the different "contents" of religion is especially clear for religious values and beliefs. As we have seen, Gendlin showed that it is not values as conceptualized that are important but the valuing process out of which such values come. This insight is extremely important for "experiential religion," not only because it means that "religious experiencing" is also a process of religious valuing, but also because it shows that to identify religion simply with what Gendlin calls "value-conclusions" is again to submerge the experiencing process in a way that can leave religious values static, or unowned, or rootless. A religious "value-conclusion" such as "it is good to love your enemies" can be the symbolization of the individual's valuing process or it can be adopted in a way that is disengaged from or even at odds with this process. If the latter is the case, if the individual adopts values that are not part of his own experiencing, the same unhappy consequences should be expected in the area of religion as in other areas of experience:

Such an adoption usually makes it less likely that the individual will ever obtain the experiential process leading to these values, than that he will arrive experientially at other values. It has a thousand side effects, including the predictable behavior differences involved in attempting to act as though he really had the given values, along with failure consequences, conflicts or inferiority, abasement, and

resentment.⁵²

What is true of religious values seems equally true of religious beliefs. For experiential religion the important thing is not the content of religious beliefs but the felt process and meaning they are meant to express. It is the believing process of an individual which is the primal reality, not the verbal formulations. In the words of Richard Niebuhr,

. . . believing is not commanded by beliefs. Beliefs come from believing; and believing is generated in experience. Believing finds satisfaction only in such statements as both express and enhance the whole scope and intensity of the experience from which it arises and to which it must contribute.⁵³

Experiential religion understands the concrete individual as a valuing and believing process. The concepts and symbols are significant as they can actually conceptualize or symbolize this process as it presently is and thereby help to carry it further. Clearly, as Gendlin points out:

There is no way to do without the concrete experiencing. Psychological, religious, or other concepts cannot purport to be the conceptual structure of experiencing. In each discourse we must ask, instead, what aspects of experiencing these or those concepts help us differentiate and refer to.⁵⁴

52 Eugene T. Gendlin, "Values and the Process of Experiencing," in The Goals of Psychotherapy, Ed. by Alvin R. Mahrer, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967, p. 196-197.

53 Richard R. Niebuhr, Experiential Religion, New York, Harper & Row, 1972, p. 69.

54 Eugene T. Gendlin, "Experiencing and the Nature of Concepts," in The Christian Scholar, Vol. 46, No. 3, Fall 1963, p. 253-254.

In experiential religion the concepts, symbols, values, and beliefs will always be seen as they are able to interact with experiencing and carry it forward. "Religious experiencing" cannot function without the use of concepts and symbols, yet the primal reality is the feeling process itself. If religious values and beliefs are adopted apart from the experiencing process, then what is had are static "entities" in the individual that are not part of his "religious experiencing" and cannot enter into his process of growth.

- c) Experiential religion is engendered by interpersonal experiencing and can be seen as a manner of experiencing.

In the previous section on "Religious Experiencing and Growth" we have seen how important the interpersonal other can be for "religious experiencing" in the context of therapy and growth. We saw that a counselor open to "religious experiencing" could provide the setting in which Sister R was able to focus on her felt experiencing of God in a way that allowed that experiencing to change, be freshly symbolized, and carried forward. We also saw in the work of James Clark, a sensitivity trainer who had an understanding of religion as process, how "religious experiencing" could be engendered and deepened in some members of the group. In our present context of experiential religion, it need only be stated that experiential religion is engendered by a process of interpersonal

experiencing.

When William James defined religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men, in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine,"⁵⁵ he seemed to exclude the interpersonal aspect of religious experience. Gendlin's thinking brings greater clarity to "religious experiencing" by allowing us to say that, while the locus of "religious experiencing" is the individual, the process is always, to a greater or lesser extent, a function of interpersonal experiencing.

In a very broad sense, the religious concepts and symbols an individual may employ are in some way derivative of the culture in which he lives and especially of the interpersonal others with whom he interacts. An experiential religion would point to the fact that no person's experiencing is in a vacuum. In a much more immediate sense, the concepts and symbols a person uses to symbolize his present feelings of the divine are often dependent on an other, who can help in the symbolization of that experiencing.

Most significant for experiential religion, however, is the fact that one person's openness to "religious experiencing" seems able to engender another's process of "religious

55 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 42.

experiencing," or (if the language will stand it), interpersonal experiencing may be an "inter-engendering" of "religious experiencing." As Clark has shown, there is something in the continuing interpersonal experiencing of the group that fosters the kind of experiencing in its members that calls for religious symbolization. In his article, "Religious Awareness and Small Groups: Warmth versus Enlightenment," Joseph Havens corroborates Clark's findings when he says:

"... important religious feelings and experiences can occur within and be engendered by group encounter."⁵⁶ Havens also sees this phenomenon at least partly attributable to the group leader, when he says: "His legitimate function is to be aware of the transcendental possibilities, to trust the group's ability to move toward them, and, occasionally, to point out the wider referent or meaning of a particular group experience."⁵⁷

With the focus on "religious experiencing" and the interpersonal other, it is easy to see that the experiencing engendered can be described as being more alive, fresh, rich, or open. Clark refers to this changed manner of experiencing in the sensitivity group, when he points out "... people can, under appropriate conditions, experience the exhilaration

⁵⁶ Havens, "Religious Awareness and Small Groups: Warmth versus Enlightenment," p. 264.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 280.

of discovering and expressing their own love and power with one another."⁵⁸ It is the interpersonal encounter which brings about a new manner of experiencing, and it is really, out of this new manner of experiencing that the religious symbolization seems to come. In other words, there is a relationship between the manner of experiencing as generated interpersonally and "religious experiencing." This relationship suggests that, in experiential religion, what transpires is the interaction of one process of "religious experiencing" with another. This interaction is not primarily concept to concept, but process to process, and especially felt aliveness to felt aliveness. Non-experiential religion may be transmitted conceptually; experiential religion is engendered or evoked when the concepts come from an implicitly felt process, which is shared.

Interpersonal experiencing and the alive and open manner of experiencing which accompanies it seem to be an essential character of experiential religion. At least, it would appear that for many people a deep sense of interpersonal sharing engenders "religious experiencing." In this interpersonal or group sharing, moreover, it is important that at least one member of the group be open to his or her "religious experiencing" and able to articulate it as felt. Experiential

⁵⁸ Clark, "Toward a Theory and Practice of Religious Experiencing," p. 254.

religion is engendered by ~~interpersonal~~ experiencing and can be seen as an alive manner of experiencing.

With the basic definition of experiential religion elaborated in these three statements, we bring the chapter to a close. In the chapter, we arrived at the process understanding of religious experience we were working toward. We have described "religious experiencing" as a primary and presently felt relating to the divine, an implicitly meaningful process able to unfold and become explicated with the proper symbols or concepts. Then, we saw "religious experiencing" as a response to questions the thinking of Marcel, Tillich, and Rogers raised as well as to the three issues which arose in psychology of religion. Next, we viewed "religious experiencing" as being inherently related to a process of growth, seeing that, when ongoing, it is a growth process and when blocked, as in the example of Sister R, it can unfold and change through focusing. Finally, we shifted our perspective again, this time drawing out some implications of "religious experiencing" for a notion of experiential religion.

CONCLUSIONS

Let me begin by listing the major conclusions which have emerged in working toward a process understanding of religious experience. Next, I will describe some shifts of perspective called for in this thesis. Then I will briefly sketch some of the implications of "religious experiencing" for the fields of psychotherapy, religious education, spiritual direction, psychology, and theology. We will conclude with some suggestions for further research.

Major Conclusions of the Thesis

In the work of rehabilitating the notion of feeling in religion we have found:

(1) that with the thinking of James and Gendlin it has been possible to describe and elaborate "religious feeling" or "religious experiencing" as an actually felt, living phenomenon of the person.

(2) that "religious experiencing," an aspect of the person's over-all "experiencing," is a felt relating to the divine, which is implicitly meaningful and can be referred to and explicated.

(3) that there is an intrinsic connection between the phenomenon of "religious experiencing" and a process of therapeutic change and growth. It is possible to speak of "religious experiencing" either as blocked in manner or as

unfolding and ongoing.

Some Shifts Arising in the Thesis

One way to describe what has happened in working toward a process understanding of religious experience is to mention significant shifts that have occurred. The basic and essential shift exemplified by this thesis is one from seeing religion as content to seeing it as process. The thesis has shown, through the phenomenon of "religious experiencing," that religion in its primacy is not static conceptual contents to be "held" by the person but rather a living personal process of relating to the divine. The "place to look" for religion has changed from a conceptual deposit of creeds and symbols to the felt, implicitly meaningful "religious experiencing" of the person.

This basic shift from content to process in religion is accompanied by a commensurate shift in methodology. The "place to stand" to see religion has changed, or more accurately, there is no one place to stand. Methodology arises out of the phenomenon to be observed. If this phenomenon is essentially a process, then the focus on it is essentially a process, a focusing, which is able to pay attention to and to further "religious experiencing" at the same time. Methodology has shifted from taking a stand so as to look at religion "outside" or "over against" to a way

of attending to it from the "inside" so that it can unfold and become further explicated.

A number of other shifts also occur. Knowledge and interpretation are seen now not as explanation but as explication. The question of the validity of religious experience touched on in Chapter I is seen not as some objective criteria to be brought to bear on religion but as something which arises from the process of "religious experiencing" in a way that fits, corroborates, and explicates. There is also a shift in the phenomenology of religious feeling from distance to immediacy, from mere description to focusing.

Implications of Religious Experiencing for Various Fields

The conclusions of the thesis and the shifts in relating to religion which they entail have clear implications for work in different fields. Let me sketch some of these implications.

(a) psychotherapy. In locating and describing "religious feeling" or "religious experiencing," we have a phenomenon which any therapist can help the client focus on. If the "religious experiencing" of the client is blocked or stopped, then the therapist can refer to and help to explicate this aspect of the person's experiencing, just as he or she would refer to any other aspect of experiencing. "Religious experiencing" obviates the old dilemma of, on the one hand,

having to reduce religion to psychology or, on the other hand, removing religion from the functioning of the rest of personality.

(b) religious education. The importance of "religious experiencing" for religious educators lies in the fact that teachers or group facilitators would be conscious of only using those symbols and concepts which clearly seem to have an experiential effect. Primary attention would not be given to religious content but to the "religious experiencing" of each person. Religious educators would understand the meaning and purpose of both experiential and non-experiential religion.

(c) spiritual direction. The spiritual director would try to get a general grasp of the kind and quality of "religious experiencing" of the person being directed. Having an understanding of the religious resources available, e.g., Scripture and spiritual writers, and having a feel for patterns of religious growth and unfolding, the spiritual director would guide the person in ways which would challenge and further his or her "religious experiencing."

(d) psychology. In the Introduction I mentioned that what I wanted to explore in this thesis is at the interface between phenomenological psychology and religious experience. In effect, "religious experiencing" is really a kind of bridge, breaking down the separation between these two areas. "Religious experiencing" is a religious phenomenon, but it is

a psychological one as well. On an experiential level, "religious experiencing" is a way of seeing unity between what one can conceive of as "psychology" and as "religion."

(e) theology. The notion of "religious experiencing" is very much in line with a view of theology as faith seeking understanding. It demands that whatever reflection we do must come from living experience, from the actual felt relating to the divine. Theological reflection would always be the explication of one's own or another's "religious experiencing."

Suggestions for Further Research

A major area for further research on "religious experiencing" is a study of this phenomenon in a therapeutic context. In religious counseling, which focuses on a person's felt relating to God, a study could be done on a number of clients to see what change occurs in their "religious experiencing" during the course of therapy. This study could be done with the help of a religious-experience questionnaire given at the beginning and end of counseling, a questionnaire able to measure the manner of "religious experiencing" as well as levels of religious maturity. A similar study could be done with a religious group in a church setting. In this case, after initially giving the religious questionnaire, the procedure of focusing would be taught to each person in

the group." Following a set number of group sessions using experiential focusing, the religious questionnaire would again be given. A control group could be used.

A second area of research would be a study to see what correlation exists between the experiencing of therapists who engage in interpersonal experiencing with their clients and the descriptions of mystical experience as detailed by James, Stace, and Underhill.¹ In other words, is there any similarity between a therapist's own deep interpersonal experiencing in therapy and some of the traditional descriptions of mystical experience? If there is a positive correlation between the two, would not experiential focusing have implications for working out an understanding of experiential mysticism?

A third area for further research, which is of particular interest to Gendlin would be to form small experiential groups to focus on the implicit meanings different individuals in the group have to some basic theological concepts, such as "the will of God," "the forgiveness of God," etc.² There would be a rich variety of personal meanings underlying these concepts, which could be focused on and furthered, while at the same time, the factual meanings of these concepts would

1 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 299-336; Walter Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1960; Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, Twelfth Edition, New York, Dutton, 1930.

2 Personal correspondence, April 17, 1978.

be seen as something to come up against and be challenged by.

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APPENDIX 1

ABSTRACT OF

Toward a Process Understanding of Religious Experience: William James and Eugene Gendlin¹

The work of this thesis is toward a redescription of the role of feeling in religious experience through the resources to be found in the writings of William James and Eugene Gendlin. James relies quite heavily on a notion of "feeling" to describe what seems to be functioning at the heart of religious experience. Gendlin, whose major thrust has been in describing and helping to facilitate therapeutic personality change, has worked with a foundational process which he calls "feeling" or "experiencing." Often, religious experience is understood as certain contents in the person. Little attention has been paid in religion to the underlying, felt, implicitly meaningful, living process out of which these contents come. With the notion of "feeling" being paramount, the work of this thesis is toward a process understanding of religious experience.

In order to show the significance of working toward a process understanding of religious experience, some initial attention is given to the ways "experience" and "religious

¹ John J. Shea, doctoral dissertation presented to the School of Graduate Studies of the University of Ottawa, February 1980, 261 p.

experience" have been approached by various thinkers. Then, three issues in the psychology of religion which call attention to the importance of approaching religious experience as a process are taken up. These issues are: "Personal Experience Influencing the Methodology in Religious Experience;" "The Subject-Object Dichotomy in Religious Experience;" and "The Role of Feeling in Religious Experience." With these issues providing a background, the working question of the thesis is stated.

Can I draw on the phenomenology of religious feeling of William James and on the phenomenon of "feeling" or "experiencing" of Eugene Gendlin in order to describe and elaborate "religious feeling" or "religious experiencing" as a felt, living process of the person?

The religious feeling described by William James in The Varieties of Religious Experience is carefully observed from several perspectives. It is seen how religious feeling has primacy over conceptualization, how it is always in relationship to the divine, and how it is closely connected to James's description of conversion and the process of unification. The way James describes "experience" and "feeling" in The Principles of Psychology and in some of his other writings is also viewed to see what inherent sense of process lies within these concepts.

As a way of furthering the sense of feeling as process which James offers, Gendlin's very processive and therapeutic understanding of "experiencing" is set forth. This

"experiencing" or "feeling" is a living, bodily phenomenon, which is the felt interaction of the person in life's situations. We see that, although preconceptual itself, this "experiencing" is implicitly meaningful and so guides the words and symbols we use to explicate it. Above all, we observe that, when paid direct attention to through a procedure of "focusing," this implicitly meaningful "experiencing" opens up and becomes an ongoing process of change and growth. With the help of appropriate symbols or concepts, "experiencing" becomes explicated, and the process is carried forward.

The focal point of the thesis is a description of an actual phenomenon which is called "religious experiencing" or "religious feeling." This "religious experiencing" is seen as a phenomenon which can be paid direct attention to. It lives in the person as presently felt and as something primary which symbols and concepts can explicate and carry forward. It is essentially a felt relating to the divine (broadly defined). Finally, it is, or at least it can be, an ongoing process of the person, a flow and unfolding of implicit meaning in relation to the divine.

Once "religious experiencing" is basically described, it is shown how this phenomenon is inherently part of a growth process. That is to say, the manner of a person's "religious experiencing" may be alive and ongoing in a way that is living and growing, or it may, for a number of

reasons, be blocked or stopped. When the manner or "religious experiencing" is blocked or hardened in some way, it is suggested that, through "focusing" on this present, felt relating to God, some opening up and change can occur. Finally, in light of the phenomenon and process of "religious experiencing," some implications for a basic understanding of "experiential religion" are drawn.