

Existential Change : Observations from the Case of Jane

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要 約

実存的変容：ジェーンの事例からの考察

Ikemi, A. : Existential Change : Observation from the Case of Jane

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本来的な生への実存的変容は実存主義の基盤である。しかしながら、Gendlin が指摘しているように、多くの実存主義の思想家はこの基盤について明瞭に記述しておらず、実存主義における自己変容のあり方は十分に論議されているとは言えない。本論では心理療法面接の一事例を紹介し、その事例に対するセラピストとクライアント両者の記述から、現象学的手法を用いて、事例に見られた本来的な生への実存的変容を検討した。その結果、概念以前の生きている感覚（フェルトセンス）、体験的空間と他者（この場合、セラピスト）の存在（プレゼンス）の相互作用がクライアントの体験過程を再構成化（reconstitute）していたことが明らかになった。このように、心理療法記録の詳細な検討により、これまであまり論じられていなかった実存的変容の瞬間のあり方がより明確に論じられることが示唆された。

The Problem : Existentialism and Change

Existentialist thinkers deny the mechanistic and reductionist view of the human person and object to the view of human behavior as formed products of mechanical forces operating within the person. Likewise, they object to the “content paradigm” (Gendlin 1964) of human personality, in which personality is described as a system of designated contents, such as motivations, traits and types. For the existentialist, “existence precedes essence”, therefore, human living (existence) always exceeds any definitions, defined character types, contents or traits (essences). If personality is composed of “building-blocks” of contents, such as memories, wishes, traits, etc., then personality change would be difficult, if not impossible to describe, unless the whole system is once torn down and reassembled. Moreover, any definition of personality would render personality change impossible by definition, unless it is shown that the original definition was incorrect.

On the other hand, however, the existentialist view of personality change is not clearly described. Existentialists do agree that there is a potential for change inherent in the person-environment (being-in-the-world). Heidegger claimed that in the *Befindlichkeit*, there is an “understanding” of *Daseins*’ authentic possibilities. However, this understanding is “moody understanding”. It is described as being a “foreknowing” and a “pre-thematic” knowing (Heidegger 1961). Thus, one cannot know in conceptual language and thought, what exactly is an authentic possibility for change. Such a possibility *can only be sensed* in one’s mood.

Moreover, exactly *how* personality change occurs, also remains unclear from an existentialist viewpoint. Since the existentialists deny a mechanistic view of the human person, there is no “mechanism” for personality change. For the existentialists, “existence precedes essence”, therefore changes in essence is preceded by changes in existence. This means that how one changes living, changes what one is. Thus, the existentialist view of personality change can be summed up only by a seemingly tautological articulation : “one changes by living differently” (Gendlin 1973). But how can one live differently?

In this paper, the author will first present a method of experiential psychotherapy called “Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy” (Gendlin 1996) and then present a case which results in changes in the client’s existence. A discussion on how change occurs in human existence will follow from the case report. In a previous paper (Ikemi 1989), an existential-phenomenological analysis of processes in therapy which *resist* existential change was reported. However, the attempt of this paper is to clarify the processes which bring about existential change towards authenticity. It is hoped that such discussions from a therapeutic standpoint will shed light to the question of how one changes living, a crucial question often left ambiguous in the writings of existentialist authors.

The Method : Focusing

The Felt Sense

“Focusing” (Gendlin 1981, Ikemi 1995) or “Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy” (Gendlin 1996) is a psychotherapy and self-help method which deepens one’s understanding of herself and situations. Focusing was developed from research into the process of what successful clients do in therapy which unsuccessful clients do not do. Successful clients often refer to what is called a *felt sense*, a preverbal sense or feel of something, which they feel in their bodies. The felt sense cannot be described exactly in words or concepts, it is a preverbal mood which one has concerning oneself or situations. Yet, reference to this unclear sense often results in a changed mode of relating to oneself and situations. Instead of trying to narrate something to the therapist, successful clients are often puzzled by, and intrigued by the felt sense. They relate to the felt sense, which begins to guide the client’s cognitions and verbalizations. Gradually, clients begin to discover that some verbalizations and conceptualizations “feel right” or “fit” with the felt sense, while some verbalizations—“rationalizations” and mere words—do not. In this way, the felt sense serves as the validating touchstone of concepts and verbalizations.

Moreover, this mode of relating to oneself often results in the *carrying forward* of experiencing (Gendlin 1964), where a previously implicit aspect of experiencing becomes explicated, yielding an authentic possibility for existence. Such explications are accompanied by a felt rightness or certainty. In Focusing, this change is referred to as a “*felt shift*”.

As Cornell (1993) described, the felt sense often consists of four dimensions. They are : the dimension of *life situations* ; the dimension of *emotional quality* ; the dimension of images or *symbolizations* ; and the dimension of the *body*. Thus, when one says “this work I am doing now feels like ... a heavy dark rock here in my chest” there is the life situation (work), the emotional quality (a heavy quality), the dimension of symbolizations (dark rock) and the dimension of the body (in the chest). In such a state, the felt sense is “full”, and it begins to have a life of its own, as it were. One cannot simply persuade it to disappear, or control it with one’s ego. There is some message there, something there that is not yet integrated in the person’s existence. These messages can be *carried forward* by asking, for instance, “what is it about this work, that feels like a heavy rock?”

However, most therapists will probably agree that not all clients can have a full felt sense. Some have strong emotions, without any body senses. Some have body senses without any emotional quality or life situations, so that they do not know what it is about. Some talk only about situations, missing or skipping the rest. The Focusing-oriented therapist tries to integrate the missing dimensions of the felt sense.

Space

Along with the felt sense, another important facet of Focusing is “space”. The two are interrelated—in fact they may be two aspects of the same phenomena—since without appropriate space there can be no felt sense.

Space does not necessarily indicate the technique of “Clearing a Space” in the “Short-Form” of Focusing (Gendlin 1981). Rather, it is a perspective with which therapists and clients view themselves and their problems. In fact, there may be two aspects of space in Focusing-oriented therapy.

First, space may be viewed as “*experiential distance*”, the distance between oneself and the inner object of his/her attention. Cornell (1993) has elaborated on this aspect and others, notably Leijssen (1995), has discussed the therapeutic use of experiential distance in psychotherapy. Experiential distance, however, is by no means exclusively unique to Focusing. Other therapies, such as Image therapy (for example : Tajima & Naruse 1987) has also discussed the significance of experiential distance in therapy. When an image or emotion is *too close* to us, they may become overwhelming or threatening. In such a state, there is emotion, but not felt senses. On the contrary, when the image or emotion is *too distant* from us, we cannot see it or feel it. For there to be a felt sense, there must be an appropriate distance in the middle—not too close and not too distant. Thus, the Focusing-oriented therapist attempts to control the client’s experiential distance, aiding the client to relate to the inner object of attention from an appropriate distance.

A second aspect of space in psychotherapy is the cognitive *emptiness*, the room from which something that was pre-conceptual can become conceptual. When the mind is preoccupied with a certain line of thought, a certain program is being run, and there is no room for something new to come in. A *momentary emptiness* of the mind, in which conceptual thinking is halted is needed in order for something new to emerge. This type of emptiness may come in meditation, when the mind is free of a certain pattern or thought, but it may also appear in small, momentary pieces within the therapy hour by certain therapist interventions, notably disidentification. Disidentification allows a space, an empty room to form, which was previously occupied by other ideations.

The Felt Sense, Space and Human Presence

Felt sense and space, as discussed above, are both functions of the interaction between the client and therapist. Neither space nor felt sense can exist without interaction, be it with another person or with oneself. There needs to be another human person present, for the client to engage with felt sense and space (self-responding is seen as secondary ; there needs to be someone to respond before one learns to respond to oneself.)

The Case of Jane¹⁾

An illustration from a therapy session is presented below to provide some practical perspectives for existential change. Note the interactions involving felt sense, space and human presence which bring about change in the client’s experiencing and existence.

The session presented here is of a case, “Jane”, a woman in her late 40’s. Jane has studied counseling for some years and is quite knowledgeable of counseling and psychotherapy. However, she had not experienced Focusing in the past. Focusing with Jane took place approximately once a month. The session described below is that of the 10th

session.

Incidentally, I have been interested in how clients' experience therapy. Such an interest in client experiences has led me to do feedback interviews with some of my clients. In the beginning of therapy, I ask my clients' permission to interview them about their sessions with me. I usually pay the client some money, approximately half of what the client pays me. I frequently provide transcripts or summaries of the Focusing session from my point of view, and ask clients to comment on my responses or my understanding of the sessions. These interviews will be referred to here, as "*feedback interviews*". These interviews have been extremely stimulating, and I have come to take the view that therapists know very little about the client's moment-to-moment experiencing and/or the effects of therapy on the existence of the client. In the case of Jane, a feedback interview was requested after the 10th interview. Thus, the following will include both my report of the session and Jane's feedback of the session.

The Sessions Begins

Jane called me 10 minutes prior to the scheduled appointment. In the phone call, she told me that she would come in 5 minutes late. I understood. I also thought this call was very much like Jane. She was very careful and polite.

When Jane came into my office, exactly 5 minutes late, she took off her coat and sat down and immediately closed her eyes and went inside. It felt as if *she* "started" the interview and I was trying to catch up with her. From this, I speculated that she was *too close*, she didn't have enough distance, since we would normally have a few words of conversation before we would start.

She had a body sense in her chest, she said. This body sense was heavy and it clung to her and it wouldn't go. By this time, I was quite sure that she was *too close*, and she needed some space, some more *experiential distance*. I asked Jane if she could first acknowledge the heaviness and try to be friendly with it, without trying to chase it away. Silently inside, she tried, but nothing changed. I asked if she could step back from it. She couldn't. I asked "what in life feels so heavy, like this" ... nothing changed. I asked if she could put this heaviness in the chair next to her and stand back from it ... she could visualize it, but the heaviness would not budge. We were in a momentary deadlock, due to the lack of appropriate space.

She looked troubled. I was, too. It felt very heavy to me too. Somehow, I said to her, "Wow, this one is a *real drag, this one*, really." "Yes, yes" she said. She closed her eyes in silence for a while. "Yeah, it's beginning to move now" she said. The body sense in her chest broke up in two and the two parts moved to each of her shoulders, the right side slightly heavier than the left.

I felt that this body sense lacked the situation. There was some "heavy" emotional quality to it, a body sense in her chest, a visual image like something being stuck there—but not the situation. My asking, "what in life feels so heavy, like this" ... was addressing this inferior modality, but at that time, this asking did not function. I kept this "on hold" in my mind until later in therapy. I was not going to be persistent about it. I was glad enough that something was now beginning to move.

〈Feedback Session — Part One〉

In the feedback session, Jane commented on this part of the session as follows :

Jane : I called you when I made a transit at a railway station. When I heard your voice and you said OK about being 5 minutes late, I felt relieved. *I also felt your presence.* Immediately after I hung up the phone, I felt as if the session had already started. In fact *it started there in the train station.*

Therapist : How do you mean that it started in the train station? How was your experience of it starting?

Jane : I recalled the previous session. I talked out of my head too much. So that day, I decided, I was going to stay close to my body. And I asked, "how is my body feeling now?". Something heavy came. Just then, the train came to the destination, and I got off. While I was walking to your office, I was with this heaviness.

Observation : Perhaps Jane was not *too close* from the start, as I had speculated. It turned out that I was not in tune with her, in terms of timing, as if I were 5 minutes behind her. She was already past the initial phase of checking into her body. She was already working with a body sense when I joined her. It wasn't the case that there was this body sense there, sticking to her without her conscious invitation.

Therapist : How did the body sense move? Were my responses helpful? And if so, do you remember what I said that was helpful?

Jane : Of course, I remember the response that made it move. The others didn't work for me. I couldn't put them aside or step back from it, I didn't even have the space to do that, so what you were saying made no sense to me. But then you said, "Wow, this one is a *real drag*, this one, really." That was great! I really *felt understood*, as if you were really with me, very close to me. Also when you said : "*this one ...*". I realized that it wasn't the whole of me that was heavy. It was "this one". Then, I immediately realized that it was about my daughter. So there was something like a shift there.

Observation : Sometimes, as in this case, experiential distance cannot be created by instructions. Instructions to create distance may sound manipulative. Jane said that it "made no sense" in that situation. Interestingly enough, what created the space was *a genuine response coming from the therapist's felt sense of the situation.* It was a genuine response and simultaneously an empathic response, to use Client-Centered terminology. To use Jane's terminology, the response was one which made her feel that the therapist was "really with me". *Human presence created the space.* It was also noted that the therapist, by habit actually, said "Wow, *this one* is a real drag, *this one*, really", which immediately served to *disidentify* her from the problem itself, making it clear that the problem was the one concerning her daughter.

The First Felt Shift

Back to the session : Jane's felt sense began to move. There was a felt sense in the shoulder, which seemed to have a vibrating rhythm. It came down again into the chest. It had a rhythm, like the heart pounding. It was like palpitations, but not the kind of cardiac palpitations that one gets in anxiety. "Heart's Rhythm" fit well. "What in my life is like that?", I invited her to ask inside. A few moments of silence Then tears came

to her eyes, relieving tears. "I know, I know now ..." she said, breaking off in crying. I waited. Then she said, "..... it's my daughter's life-energy. I just remembered the sound of her heart beating, which I heard in the hospital when she was inside me. It's her energy to live. There are all kinds of things I don't approve about her, all kinds of things I would not like to see ... yet, all of what she's doing is her energy, to live, to create her life I know ... that's why it split in two ... life for me and her ... yes ..."

I waited for a while, occasionally reflecting her words, seeing that she takes in what she now discovered. They seemed to be very relieving. Yet, I was sensing that something more was there. There still seemed to be a cloud, hanging over her expressions. I waited until her crying stopped. Then I wanted to know if we could go one more step from it, and asked how she felt in her body now. If it was all clear, I was going to stop, if not, I decided to go another round.

<Feedback Session — Part Two>

In the feedback session, Jane reflected on this part of the session as in the following. *Jane* : That was a really big shift there. My daughter was an "all good" girl until she went to high school. Then she realized that she couldn't live that way. She dyed out her hair, she dressed funny. She began to go out with people whom we wouldn't approve. She ran away from home. She comes home now and then, then leaves again. She said she couldn't live the the world of her parents.

Therapist : And what did the shift show you ?

Jane : I realized that that was OK. As a family, perhaps we were too close to each other. Now she needed to test herself, build herself, her life. She's acting that way because it's her energy to find her own life. Yes, I realized, it is her energy. I really love her, and so also her livelihood, her energy.

Observation : This was very typical of a felt shift, where experiencing is carried forward. The rhythm in her chest brought to her, some aspect which was pre-conceptual until that moment. The carrying forward changed her relationship towards herself and to her daughter. It felt right, felt good and relieving. She wasn't trying to convince herself. She had, at that moment, changed.

The Next Turn

Back to the Focusing session itself, Jane's had just experienced a felt shift, and yet things were not all clear in her body. Although she felt clear in her chest, there was still some heaviness around it. Something more was there. Should we go another round ? The therapist pondered for a moment ; 40 min. had already passed, there was too much stress in his body from concentrating for such a long time. But yet he felt that something was needed here. It was space.

I invited the client to "put all that kind of you, with all the heaviness" on the chair, in the corner of the room for a while. I pointed to the chair. I was very directive here, because I knew that Jane often had problems in finding appropriate distance.

Jane stared at the chair for a long while. "OK", she said.

"If you look from here, at you there—what comes to you?" I asked.

There was a long, concentrated silence. The kind of silence that one dared not

disturb. Then Jane suddenly began to cry. There were tears of relief. She was trying to speak, but the crying disturbed her. I told her that she need not bother to speak. If the crying had to come, it had to come first. She was crying for a while. After a while she spoke.

"I said to the me in that chair, 'hey, you're pretty!' "It's OK, being overwhelmed with that whole damn thing, that's like you, that's all about being human, man! That's good, pretty girl!"²⁾

I reflected, "It's OK, it's You. It's being human, to be overwhelmed about this."

Jane nodded and healing tears flowed from her eyes.

After a while, the session ended. She looked energized.

〈Feedback Session — Part Three〉

At the end of our Focusing session, I was not all clear about the connections. It seemed as if I did not understand fully, the shift that happened in Jane. In the feedback session, she reported the following changes that occurred as a result of this last shift.

Jane : That was something I hadn't experienced before. That was totally new, another level of consciousness.

Therapist : How do you mean?

Jane : It was the "*trickster*", in Jungian language. I never use words like "damn" and never call myself "girl" in that way. I listened to the tape recorder several times. My voice had energy, and a playful quality. I'm saying, "this whole *damn* thing" and "its all about being human, *man*".

Observation : This is not like the way Jane usually is. She is usually very careful, nice and polite. She calls for being just 5 minutes late!

Therapist : Oh, I see—the *trickster*. (The therapist was amazed that such a concept would emerge, *from the client!*) Would you say that I should have reflected it? Play up that quality?

Jane : No, I liked it, that you reflected "it's you, it's being human". I felt in some way that you were looking at the whole of me rather than the particular state I was in, at the time. I also felt respected that you didn't reflect the words "damn" and "man" and all.

Therapist : And were there changes in your living since then?

Jane : Oh, yes! First of all, on the way home. On the train home, as I was approaching the station where I live, I suddenly started to laugh. I don't know why, but I was laughing and trying to hide my laughter on the train, people would think I was strange. (The therapist reassured her that laughter of this kind often accompanies big felt shifts.) Then, when I went home, I was standing in the kitchen and my daughter came home and said "Hi, mom!". That was really a surprise, because when she comes home, she usually says nothing and goes straight to her room.

Therapist : Something about you, your aura, your atmosphere must have been different, changed. And that changed your daughter too, perhaps?

Jane : Yes. We even talked at dinner! And I realized I was different. I looked at her and I really wondered how pretty she was. She is beautiful! She has beautiful skin, and I said that to her "You're so pretty, can I touch you" and touched her face. My daughter

said “Mom!” but she looked happy. There was a new relationship with her. She has these funny looking socks which I thought were no good. But for some reason, I wanted to try them and tried them!

Therapist : And how were they ?

Jane : They were warm, I even bought them!

Therapist : So you did change! And your relationship with your daughter changed. Then *she* changed, too!

Jane : Not only with my daughter! I had some time to talk with my colleague at work and I talked about my husband. Then my colleague said, “I didn’t know you were so cute, I didn’t know that side of you”. I think the trickster is still with me!

Space, Presence and Felt Sense in Existential Change

Space

The session illustrated above points to the importance of Space in Focusing and therapy in general. Space is the capacity from which something new, some new life-direction, some new ways of thinking and living, emerges. *Space is the capacity for transcendence.*

Looking at herself, in imagination, sitting in the corner of the room, Jane disidentified herself from the Jane burdened by all her concerns. For the moment, she was not Jane. She was the “looking-at-Jane”. She had, in that moment, *transcended* the life-situations of Jane. The “looking-at-Jane” was not bound by Jane’s usual way of looking at life-situations. It was, in her own words, “another level of consciousness”.

In this “level of consciousness”, disidentification is confirmed through the temporary abatement of the *felt sense*. We know that we have space, because it feels different. From here, something new can emerge.

This transcendence is possible only through the temporary suspension of the unceasing flow of cognitive thought. It requires a momentary stillness, unbound by the daily concerns. It is similar to Eastern thought, where “form is emptiness and emptiness is form” (Heart Sutra, a Buddhist text) or the Yoga text, *Patanjali* which mentions that the mind is like a pond. When there are waves on the surface, the depth cannot be seen. When the surface is still, the depth can be seen.

From this temporarily still space, emerged another way of being. “The trickster” involved another kind of living, another mode of existence that differed from Jane’s usual way of living. It was a different way of being and relating, and a different role of motherhood. Her living, her existence, had changed. *She* had changed, her relationships with others had changed. Then, her daughter and others changed. Since the behavior of one party of a relationship is, to a large degree, determined by the modality of the relationship, others had also changed, as Jane changed. A new *mode of existence* emerged.

Presence

From space emerged the “trickster” existence. However, the Jungian terminology “trickster” is not such an important one for the Focusing-oriented therapist. More than

the terminology, the way of living which is implied by it, or more specifically the way of existence that is implied in Jane's usage of the term "trickster" is most important. As Gendlin (1996) writes in notes on one of his cases :

..... "playfulness" is just a word. If playfulness is thought of as content, the point will be missed. In playfulness is a different way of being alive, a willingness to engage the tough issues with an appetite for living, an ability to recall good times and a joy of life. (p. 147)

This new "trickster" mode of living was by no means imposed upon Jane by the therapist. It emerged on its own accord. In fact, the Jungian terminology "tricker" came from the client, not the therapist! As Gendlin (1991) writes, human nature has this ability to create its own order—it is not a *tubula rasa* on which any story or way of existence can be imposed and inscribed.

How can a new existence emerge on its own accord? It might be said that if we are *present* (Gendlin 1991), if we maintain the relationship in a certain *reconstituting* way (Gendlin 1964), this way of relating will give rise to the emergence of a new existence. *The transcendent space is a function of the relationship.*

Gendlin's formulation of "*reconstituting*" shows how one's presence brings to function, aspects of experiencing which were previously not functioning. The therapist's presence in Jane's experiencing of watching herself from a space reconstituted the trickster aspect of her experiencing. It may also be recalled that earlier in the session, the therapist's comment, "wow, this one is a real drag" served the *carry forward* Jane's felt sense. It explicated the relationship with her daughter. In these ways, the therapist's presence and interaction served to reconstitute and carry forward dimensions of the client's experiencing in the session. What emerged in the session, is therefore contingent on the mode of relationship between the therapist and client.

In this mode of relationship, what emerges is not something entirely out of order, as it may seem at first. Logically, at first, Jane's "trickster" way of being, may seem to have no relevance with the givens of her problem with her daughter. The "trickster" may seem to have come from the air. However, it was there implicitly. It was, in a sense, *already there.*

Felt Sense

The interactions which brought forth a new way of existence emerged through working with the felt sense. It may be recalled that at the outset, Jane had a heavy felt sense in her chest. What transpired in the session came from this felt sense.

At the beginning of the session, Jane did not know conceptually what the felt sense was about. It was only there as a preconceptual sense of living, as in Heidegger's description of *Befindlichkeit* (Heidegger 1961). Yet through the interactions, she discovered that it was about her daughter and her relationship to her daughter. Moreover, the felt sense knew at a preconceptual level, that it was her daughter's energy to live—an energy which she approved and appreciated, despite her initial conceptual disapproval of its manifestations. The felt sense pointed to this incongruence in Jane, and then showed

her how she appreciated and loved her daughter at a deeper level of awareness.

In the next turn, she felt sense of heaviness around her chest after the initial shift showed her how to live—it was an encompassing understanding, not only involving her daughter. Indeed the felt sense disclosed a “*foreknowing*” of this mode of existence.

Thus the trickster came naturally to Jane. It may be noticed that Jane did not need to make a specific effort to live in a trickster way. (Before she even realized it fully, her daughter noticed the change and said “hi, mom!”) In this sense, the new mode of existence is not brand-new. It is also felt with great relief, like a coming home. The new is not all new, and the absent is not all absence. The absent that newly emerges, the mystery which takes us to different ways of living and adventures, is most unknown to us and at the same time, the most well known.

In Summary

It can be illustrated from the case of Jane, that existential change is based on a preconceptual and preverbal sense of living, the felt sense. Change does not come, only as a consequence of conceptual and rational thought without this bases. It can also be illustrated that felt sense is engaged with and explicated from a self-transcending standpoint, namely space. Space and felt sense function in an interrelated way. The interrelations of space and felt sense is facilitated by the presence and interaction from the other, in this case the therapist. Human presence in this interaction propels the process through carrying forward and reconstituting dimensions of experiencing. Thus, the interactions of felt sense, space and human presence are seen as the grounds upon which existential change happens in the person.

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Notes

- 1) The psychotherapeutic technicalities of "The Case of Jane" has been discussed in another paper : Ikemi, A., ; 'The Use and Significance of Space in Focusing', in (Feurerstein, H., Muller, A. & Weiser Comell, A. Ed.) *Focusing in Process, Rowohlt (Germany), in press.*
- 2) Much of the quality here is lost in translation

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