

## The *Feeling Of Knowing*: Post Post Modernism

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I think we should call this presentation a Gene talk rather than a Ted Talk. It has the gripping, sexy, compelling title of POST POST MODERNISM.

One of the major miracles of my life has been the serendipitous gift of encountering the genius of Gene Gendlin and the nourishing and inspiring way of thinking, being and working I received from him. I want to give you a tiny glimpse of what I learned from Gene in the more than 40 years I've known him. Yet it isn't the "what" - the content was never really the point for Gene. It is more the "how" I learned from him. I will give you a flavor of our interactions with a story using 7 little scenes.

### Scene #1

This first one I learned of after Gene had died when I read Lore Korbei's interview with him about his escape from the Nazis. I was struck by Gene's recalling his amazement at his father's ability to make life and death decisions based on his *feeling*. He wondered, "What kind of feeling is this that tells you what to do?" I think he spent his life exploring this question.

### Scene #2

I remembered the story of how as a young philosophy student Gene said that he didn't want to only learn about great philosophies. He wanted to be able to go to "the larger realm at the edge of thinking," where the great philosophers went to find their thinking. He pursued this goal for a lifetime.

### Scene 3

The first time I met Gene in the early 70s, I was a young clinician looking for a way of putting together all of the approaches I had learned. I serendipitously came across a flyer announcing that Gene was doing a workshop on Experiential Psychotherapy. I had never heard of him, but had an urgent feeling that I had to attend even though I had just moved to a new apartment and had unpacked boxes all over the place. He was doing a

“listening round,” teaching us how to listen to what the person was trying to get at—what was right beneath the surface of their awareness. I was captivated by how he could tune into “The deeper point” and that as he listened it opened up to something deeper and truer. He was already at that time in touch with that “larger realm at the edge of thinking.” By reflecting the essence of what people were saying, what we would now call the felt sense, he was able to bring people to that deeper level with him. It seemed quite magical. I knew I needed to know this as a therapist. I’d hoped that it would help me put together all of the other approaches that I had learned. It did, of course.

#### Scene #4

Fast forward to the early 90s. I had worked with Gene while he was in New York and then studied and taught his work after he left. I hadn't seen him for over 10 years and then suddenly he called and said he had come back to the Big Apple. I was so excited to reconnect with him. When I walked into his apartment on the Upper West Side he greeted me warmly, looked at me intensely and said, "Do you know what's happening in the world? It is a very big problem! Postmodernism has taken over everything and now they are saying that everything is relative and that you can't know anything! How can therapists do their work if everything is as good as everything else? I sputtered and sat down and answered that in my psychoanalytic world we were very happy to get rid of the idea that the therapist knows the truth and interprets it to the client. We were happy with the emphasis on subjective truth—the idea that nothing is really objective. Gene said, "Of course nothing is objective because nothing stands alone outside of us. We are always affecting everything as it is affecting us. It's not outside of us, but neither is it only inside. We are interaction and whatever we think and experience is of course affecting everything else and changing it. There is no objectivity and there is no subjectivity." You can imagine how this was quite a mouthful to digest!

He explained that there is another kind of knowing which we depend on as therapists, especially when we know Focusing. It is a deeper implicit knowing. We have a definite feel when something is true and right. It comes alive and it carries forward—it goes somewhere—it touches us, it has an intricate “more” to it! We experience this rightness in the moment in our bodies. It isn't just arbitrary!!!

This started many conversations and some arguments about what he called "post post modernism" – the kind of knowing that we recognize as "a ring of truth" –the aliveness of the deeper implicit realm at the edge of thinking. We know it because it opens up to more. It "carries forward," as Gene puts it.

#### Scene #5

In a recent visit he had more energy than usual in this last phase of life. He told me with great interest that one of the students in his phone class insisted that there should be a seventh step to Focusing, one in which the focuser *took responsibility* for the process by taking an action step. "The importance of action is right," he said, "but responsibility is something imposed from above rather than coming from underneath...actually I don't like the word responsibility. Responsibility is a bad word." I chimed in and said "Oh yes! Entitled is a bad word also. And I hate the word appropriate!" Then he broke into a big smile. "And IS is a bad word!" he pronounced devilishly. We both broke into hearty laughter. By that time I understood that the word IS implies a static condition. And nothing simply "is." "IS" is always BECOMING. Nothing is forever separately standing on its own. Life is an interactive movement, not a static timeless "IS."

#### Scene #6

The last time I visited Gene he was very frail, could hardly sit up. I noticed an open book by his side. When I asked him what he was reading, he smiled and said he was reading his own Process Model. "What do you think of this Gendlin book?" I asked. He said, "I was disappointed when I read little bits of it, but now I read the whole thing and it is good. I am satisfied!" He had explored and articulated the kind of feeling his father had used to bring the family to safety—the kind of feeling that can tell you what to do. He had found his way to the larger realm at the edge of thinking and he showed us how to find it with him.

#### Scene #7

Although this seems like a good place to conclude, I have one more scene to tell you about. The time before the last time I saw Gene, he told me that the hospice people had sent an orthodox rabbi to visit him. He had welcomed such a visit, but was very disappointed in it. He said, "When I asked him anything, he would point his finger and say 'It's because the Torah says so.' I can't talk to this guy!" But then during my last visit he said that the rabbi

had returned and had told him about a bird's nest outside his door and that he loved watching the baby birds learn to fly. Gene said enthusiastically: "He is the real thing! He has reverence. I don't care what he believes if he has reverence, I can talk to him." I think that REVERENCE is the most important thing I learned from Gene. We all can see it in his eyes and hear it in his voice in the video demonstrations of him working with people. His passionate devotion to the *person* the "*one in there*" and to the forward movement that is inherent to life. This attitude of reverence is the basis for all his writings and teachings.