

Spring 2011 The Feel of Sensing
Orientation for Week 5

In this Orientation, I will continue to explore the idea of the 'field', which underlies our work in this nine-week program. I keep returning to it because it goes against our usual way of perceiving and making sense of the world, and because it genuinely seems to me that a 'field orientation' can have a profound effect on how we know and how we live.

We are used to thinking in terms of objects and identities. Our own identity as the subject who knows, uses, judges, and labels objects goes along with this. At a deeper level, objects stand in relation to each other in ways that set up a characteristic understanding of space (separation, distance, boundaries, limits) and time (from/to, between, disappearing moments, linear connections.) In turn, that limits the possibilities for knowledge.

The shift to a field perspective makes appearance far more unitary. Whatever appears, whatever we experience (including ourselves) arises/emerges/takes place within a field, and the field as a whole shares in the qualities of that experience. In fact, it makes those qualities possible. Nothing is left out. There is nothing that does not fit. There is still a focus of attention and an unfolding dynamic, but ideas like 'distance' and 'separation' lose their hold on our intelligence and our experience. They very likely still operate, but only as structures within a particular field. Other structures are equally possible.

New fields are constantly arising, each field with its own feel. This is in one sense a limitation, because the feel of the field determines what is possible. But awareness of field dynamics and mechanics, and of fields succeeding one another and interacting with one another, lets us open each field-imposed limit. We discover the field as a field. One consequence is that we do not have to reject or undermine our ordinary perceptions and knowledge, our world of things and judgments and concerns. They, too, are the manifestations of a field.

In the beginning, the idea of taking on a field orientation is a speculation: a possibility that we do not really know how to engage. As last week's reading said, speculation understood as speculation only confirms the limits of the field(s) in operation, because we speculate that it might be different. The effect, says the reading, is to make awareness restless. But we can also aim to speculate differently, to see differently. Such a seeing is not conceptual. It engages the feel of the field.

In exploring experientially the feel of space, the edges of objects where space and object meet, we aim to engage the feel of the field in just this way. The space that accommodates an object is not separate from the object; if it were, it could not allow the object to be. So when we engage space, we engage the field.

Physical objects are accommodated by physical space, and that is the easiest place to start exploring. But mental objects are accommodated by mental space (even if we can't say exactly what 'mental space' might mean.) For instance, if you imagine your bed, you are also imagining the space that the bed occupies. The field and the object are given together. You might take this a step further: in what space does the act of imagining your bed and its bed-space happen? What field is in operation there?

I have posted on the website a shortened passage from Sacred Dimensions of Time and Space that gives more 'body' to the idea of space. Space and field are closely linked, and the feel of the field is also the field of space. You may ask, "But does space have a feel? How can it, when space is nothing at all?" The reading from Sacred Dimensions offers a way in to that question. In the phone call I asked you to work with the 'edges' of space in light of that reading, and gave you an assignment: to post a comment on your experience on the website. I look forward to seeing how that goes.

To bring field-dimensionality into contact with our focus on the senses, try being aware of the feel of each sense-field. It is obvious that the field of smell is different from the field of hearing. But once you go past that obvious conclusion, you can explore the 'feel' of the difference. What knowing is available there?