

V A S T N E S S of GENERAL SEMANTICS

V A S T ...Great in Extent or Range.

In my studies and practice of general semantics over the years, I have come to higher and higher levels of appreciation of this system, Korzybski's legacy to humanity as, as a valuable contribution to our human welfare. If as a species we ever come to realize that to change our human situation we have to change our ways of thinking, I believe general semantics with its vast range of applicability qualifies as a thinking model and evaluation standard to be considered in any proposals for change. As the piece below does not, cannot say all... Please feel free to add insights from your own experience. I have used the letters "V", "A", "S", "T" to represent some of the main general semantics key terms and principles.

VALUES...VARIABLE...VISUALIZATION

Values have to do with "what is considered worthwhile, useful, and important". Korzybski formulated general semantics as a General Theory of Values. For our own wellbeing, and in terms of the sanity and survival of the species, it makes sense for us to **start** with evaluation values that we think will improve our ways of being. Some general semantics evaluation values and psychological tools include principles of non-identity, non-allness, non-additivity, non-elementalism, consciousness of abstracting, conscious time-binding, generalization of the methods and approach of science and mathematics, and sanity of the race, among others.

The variable is defined as "a symbol that can represent any one of a set of values". We have lived through different spaces and times. We bring our own experiences, beliefs, memories, interests, hopes, fears, skills, and so on, to a situation. Each one of us experience and value things differently--and value different things: We cannot help but have different values. Things change: We are not the same from one day to the next--We can think of every thing, including ourselves, as variables. With our different values and valuing we have the ability to help each other in diverse ways. Valuing the notion of the variable, and 'seeing' see things from different points of viewing, lead us to value potentials and possibilities. This helps us develop more creative approaches to thinking about, understanding, and doing things...And this eventually leads us to value improvement.

VISUALIZATION.

Valuing words more than what they are used to represent often sabotage our evaluations. We can complement our verbalism with visualization. Visualizing helps us to 'see' things in terms of relationships and structures. With visualization we see things from different structural perspectives—we learn to recognize more variables in a situation, and with more

variables make more accurate ‘maps’. With more accurate maps we are better able to find our way through unfamiliar territories.

ATTENTIVENES...ABSTRACTING...ADJUSTMENT...ADVANCEMENT

To develop consciousness of abstracting, we need to train ourselves in “conscious abstracting”. To improve ourselves as individuals; to adjust ourselves to the ups and downs of living; to see word, labels, names, definitions, and classifications, maps, etc., as not the same, but different from the things we talk about, or label, or name, or classify, or map, we need to be alert and attentive to what we are thinking-feeling, saying, and doing. With higher levels of awareness we can better evaluate our thoughts and actions and make more appropriate adjustments for improvements. Here is a little formula I value a great deal: Self-improvement is a function of self-correction. And self-correction is a function of self-awareness. I believe that to advance to higher stages of personal development, and time-binding excellence, we can apply a calculus approach to develop alertness and attentiveness to what we are doing, and how we do what we are doing, so that we can general-semantically minimize the harmful effects of millions of instances of cultural conditioning and reap the rewards from applying general semantics principles as ABMs...attitudinal and behavioral modifiers.

SYMBOLS...SCIENCE...SANITY...SURVIVAL...SPEAKING

We live in neuro-linguistic, and neuro-semantic environments. We are symbol creators, symbol users, and meaning givers. If we don’t learn how to ‘rule’ our symbols, especially our own words and the words of others...our words and symbols will rule us. Korzybski was concerned with the sanity of the species. He proposed that in the methods of modern science there are factors of sanity to be tested empirically. We can think of general semantics as “generalized science”. We can study the methods and apply them to everyday situations. One of the most important aspects of a scientific approach has to do with revision. In science, what’s going on in our ‘heads’—our theories--are revised in the light of new information. In everyday situations we tend to defend our ideas, our feelings about things, our beliefs, our values, etc., verbally, and sometimes violently. General semantics also involves speaking about speaking and thinking about thinking. Our words reflect our thoughts. We behave following the way we think. We tend to ‘see’ situations, and respond to ourselves, others and situations based on the way we think and talk about things...And vice versa. I believe that one of the most effective ways to practice general semantics involves being attentive to the way we speak.

SET

A set constitutes as any collection whatsoever, defined by some rule which specifies exactly what will belong to the collection. We each make up (often unknowingly) our own rules as to whom and what will qualify and belong to our unique collection of friends, values, beliefs, and so on. Our individual set of behaviors support our individual set of values, beliefs, fears, interests, and so on. As a consequence of our diverse interactivities, we can anticipate and predict clashes with others following their own values, interests, and

beliefs. If I consider a fetus as a member of the set of persons with rights, I will be offended by abortion. If I make the word “nigger” or “gay” members of the set of terms I find offensive, I will react accordingly. If one nation follows a policy that believes all nations should belong to the set “democratic government”, it is predictable that some will resent this inclusion.

SPIRIT

Many students of general semantics avoid the word “spiritual” as not being scientific or even deny the existence of anything “spiritual”. In *Manhood of Humanity* Korzybski wrote “ Though this book has been written with scrupulous care to avoid words or terms of vague meaning—and though it often may seem coldly critical of things metaphysical, it has not been written with indifference to that great, perhaps the greatest, urge of the human heart---craving for the higher potentialities of that which we call “mind”, “soul’, and “spirit”...I do many things to nourish my spirit. I enjoy watching little babies smiles. I enjoy trees and clouds and sunsets I find beautiful. I like to hear little children singing. I enjoy seeing someone doing their job well and enjoying themselves. Curiosity elevates my spirit. I like making up my own theories about what’s going on. If I might ask: What do you do to nourish your spirit?

STRUCTURE...SELF-THERAPY...

The word “structure” is one of the few in the English language that we can use to form a sentence without additional words. “Structures structure structures.” This suggests to me the wide applicability and potential value to thinking in terms of order-relationships-structure. The quality of our living involves the way we structure-map situations and our lives. As far as we know everything is related—and can be structured. Korzybski proposed that structure is the only content of knowledge. What we claim to know involves structure, order, and relationships--relationships between whatever is going on, the transmission of information, the processing of this information, and functional relationships with other ‘things’—including ourselves. For our sanity, we need to match the structure of our language with the structures of our world. We would benefit greatly by understanding the structure of our thinking-processes...presently described as mainly “Aristotelian” (two valued, either/or, elementalistic, additive, etc.) so we can improve on this through applying the principles of a “non-aristotelian system”. We can use general semantics principles to transform ourselves to higher levels of being. Through conscious time-binding (applying the principles of general semantics) we can develop time-binding excellence. (See “Practicing Conscious Time-binding” in ETC: at <miltondawes.com>

STANDARD. We use clocks, tapes, scales, etc. as standards, and reference points. We can think of the structural differential, as a general semantics evaluation standard, a model against which we can compare-measure our thinking, feeling, attitude, evaluations, in terms of identification, allness, elementalism, etc. We use clocks, balances, tapes, etc., to modulate our social interactions. In general, we have not yet accepted a proposal for a Universal Evaluation Standard—General Semantics proposed by Korzybski. Until then (if

ever) we can expect increase conflicts, disagreeableness, and violence to result from valuing our present ways of thinking.

STRUCTURAL SIMILARITY (relative invariance under transformation) General semantics is founded on the principles of “non-identity” and “asymmetric relationships”—no two things (or even one thing in terms of change) are the same in all respects. Without the relative invariance (structural similarity) principle grounding our neurological processes, we probably would be unable to make sense of anything. I also see this principle as “vast” in that it can be assumed to be a semantic foundation on which we build rules, laws, and societies. And our sensing, learning, expectations, theories, and predictions would probably make little sense without this guiding principle. We would make no plans, no decisions, etc., if we did not expect a certain degree of invariance in the environment. And our living would probably be irresolvably messy. Thinking in terms of structural similarity helps us to make sense in a world where as far as we know, no two things are identical. We become more creative beings when we move from the categorical, and closed “A is B” to the more structurally useful and mind-opening “A is somewhat like B.”

TIME...TIME-BINDING...TRANSCENDENCE...TOOL...

We acknowledge a Universe of change when we date our ideas, feelings, beliefs, conclusions, judgments, and so on. We become more conscious time-binders by applying general semantics principles as a method for improvement: we complement our dependence on gut feelings, trial and error, intuition, etc. Using general semantics time-binding principles as our evaluation tools, we can transcend to some degree (go beyond) our usual ways of thinking about things, and develop more feelings of interconnectedness and interdependence. When we have a method we are conscious of applying, we can modify or abandon this method when it no longer works for us. Through conscious time-binding we can make better progress in whatever we choose. Through conscious time-binding we have a method for making progress in whatever we choose—and a tool for transforming ourselves.

THEORY

We can apply a theoretical approach to anything we think and do. This makes sense when we attend to the factor that we don't know all about anything. With a theoretical approach we are more open to corrections, and more prepared for changes in the light of new information. With a theoretical approach we are not as devastated and disappointed when our plans and expectations, are not met. When our theories are not confirmed this tells us something about how Universe works. But we don't always listen. For our sanity sake, to live less stressful, more creative, more satisfying lives, I think it's to our advantage to refine our culturally conditioned ways of thinking and strive to create more accurate theories regarding the personal, social, political, economic, and other structures we live with and in.

My two most favorite general semantics principle are the calculus and relative invariance under transformation. The calculus is a very powerful scientific and psychological tool .The calculus can be applied to the immeasurably small and immensely large. Like general semantics, I think of it as vast in its potentials. Generalized, the calculus is about being incrementally attentive to changing relationships. Korzybski wrote that he could not have developed general semantics without the calculus. The calculus and consciousness of abstracting are closely related. If we remember that while awake we are constantly abstracting, then the more instances of awareness in any given situation the more chances we have to be consciously abstract (think-feel, do with awareness) and to be conscious of our abstracting (to be aware that we have not included all.

In closing I say this: It seems to me the vastness of general semantics as a set of psychological tools we can use to improve our ways of being human, is not yet appreciated to any significant or influential degree. One can only hope this will change.

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