

## Asymmetric Relationships

Asymmetric Relationships is only one of several general semantics principles we can use to expand and refine our understanding of diverse goings on.

The Taliban was defeated and driven out of office. What was not destroyed, defeated, or driven out, was their strong determination. Politician and generals generally are not skilled psychologists. In their planning and decisions, they are not likely to include an important factor: Bullets, bombs, and missiles, although usually potent forces, cannot destroy and defeat, are not effective, and give no advantage, against minds occupied by a strong determination...a determination in control of minds...and directing behavior...including inconsistency between what the Taliban say in negotiations...and what they do.

That the Taliban would not lose the war in Afghanistan was predictable. It was predictable based on one principle "Asymmetric relationship."

A few words about asymmetric relationship: We live in a world of asymmetric relationships. Although the notion of equality has been institutionalized, and much talked about in some countries, equality (or 'equalness'), except in mathematics, has not been found (so far). Things are different in many different ways: This has been emphasized in the system "General Semantics, as a **principle of "non-identity": No two things are the same in all respects.** The principle has been popularized: You might have heard: "The word is not the thing", and "The map is not the territory."

The asymmetric non-identity relationship principle is about "**difference...difference in a particular way.** If we are standing beside each other on a flat surface, the word "beside" expresses a symmetric relationship: I am beside you, and similarly, you are beside me. But if I am standing beside you...on your left side, "on your left side" expresses an asymmetric relationship in the dimension of position. Unlike

"besides", the reverse is not true. If I am on your left, I am not just beside you...you are on my right.

If we accept that no two things are the same in all respects: The asymmetric relationship principle can be applied in the study of many aspects of a relationship. Thinking of asymmetry in terms of "advantage" in a relationship: If you are six feet tall, and I am four feet tall, and we are reaching for something on a shelf eight feet high, in terms of an asymmetric relationship, you have the advantage **in terms of height...in that situation**. If we are trying to reach something in a tunnel two feet in diameter, being the smaller one, I have the advantage...**in terms of size...in that situation**. If you are on my right, and there is an item on your right, you are closer, and have an advantage in accessing the item before I can.

### **Asymmetric relationship applied to the war against the Taliban**

Asymmetric relationship, applied to the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan (and other wars of that type)--In terms of vulnerability, the Taliban has many military advantages. I mention some below...the order is not significant. (Note. This was written when the war was going on.)

(1) The Taliban has the advantage **in terms of location**. They know the territory much better than foreigners...They know where to hide and wait for suitable conditions; what regions to avoid or locate, in terms of setting or avoiding, ambush...They know what regions that were treacherous, and should be avoided in terms of troop, and vehicular movement...they know the regions that would support speedy movement...They know short cuts.

(2) The Taliban as natives, has the advantage: They **know the people**...can get help, send along, and get information, food, shelter, etc., from supporters.

(3) The Taliban has the advantage in **not needing translators**. In terms of time, they have the advantage in not having to wait for translations.

(4) The Taliban has the advantage. They do not wear **easily identified uniforms**, presenting themselves as easily seen targets. They do not go

on patrols...inviting ambushes. Unless an invading army resort to nuclear war, an army, no matter how powerful, is at a disadvantage. An army cannot win a war against an enemy, **not as easily seen and located** as they are. Taliban can 'hide' and move freely among the people in a village (as Castro did). A foreign soldier can be standing beside someone...but not know whether him/her was enemy, villager, 'farmer', messenger, non-combatant, etc.

(5) The Taliban has the advantage. They have the advantage in **not having headquarters**, bases with troops and vehicles, etc....that can be easily located, targeted, and attacked.

(6) The Taliban has the advantage. While American and allied armies are still fighting 19th. century wars (and teaching Afghanistan soldiers): The Taliban is fighting their **twenty first century war...not restrained by national (political) and international rules and regulations**. They make up and follow their own rules and strategies as they go along. They can quickly change strategies, and make quick changes, as situations change.

(7) The Taliban has the advantage. They do not operate as a typical national army following military order and hierarchies. Depending on prevailing or anticipated conditions, they can **make quicker changes** than can a regular army.

(8) The Taliban has the **advantage in terms of time and cost**. For them: **The war lasts as long as it lasts**. It suits the Taliban's allies to keep funding them against America and its allies. The Taliban does not have a political system with opposing parties...where one party leaders and members--dissatisfied with how much the war is costing...how long it has been going on...how many lives were lost...and so, justify mounting political attacks against the other party to end the war.

(9) The Taliban has the advantage. They know more about, and **can better prepare for weather changes, and changing weather changes**, than a foreign army.

(10) The Taliban has the advantage. **They are natives in the region**...Equipment and replacements are not thousands of miles away. Their allies will keep supplying them to be used against America and its allies.

(11) The Taliban has the advantage. People in a village cannot help foreign soldiers. They intuitively know that foreign soldiers could not protect them from swift and brutal retaliation...The Taliban could destroy their whole village.

**'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'**  
—George Santayana.

There have been many historical tales of disadvantages suffered by armies in foreign lands...The 'Germans' bogged down by Russian winter comes to mind. The British did not win in Afghanistan...Nor did the Russians. In Jamaica (where I was born) The British had to make a treaty with the Maroons who persistently attacked and retreated to not easily traversed regions of Jamaica...mountainous regions that the British could not penetrate...and could be easily defeated if they tried. The Maroons had the advantage. They would not be enslaved. They gained their independence.

**Some propositions based on applying the asymmetric relations principle.** As mentioned earlier on: Based on the fact that we live in a world of asymmetric relationships, (deterritorializing Deleuze and Guattari's "deterritorialization") from a geographical perspective: The asymmetric relationship principle can be generally applied.

Applying the principle to the war against the virus: Those individuals who got vaccinated-and continue to take precautions, have an advantage (in terms of avoiding infections and probably dying)...over those who have not been vaccinated, and continue to ignore taking precautions. Nations where individuals are less resistant to taking precautions, will have an advantage of less infections and deaths, a shorter lasting pandemic, less misery, etc., than nations with many individuals resisting vaccination and not taking other precautions.

## **The method of Science as an approach**

If the method of science is about exploring, extending, and improving, our knowledge and understanding of structures-operations, and their relationships to other structures and operations (goings on)...Given that we live in a world, where as far as we know, everything is in relationships--The method of science is applicable to any goings on...not only to physical structures-operations and forces. If every-'thing' has a structure, behaves in particular ways, and is in relationships with other 'things'...The method of science (a supreme example of a structural-operational approach) can be deterritorialized and applied to human behavior, human values, human relationships, our psychologies and philosophies...and reflexively to the method itself. (We can use the method to study the method.) (So far, the method is not thought of (not deterritorialized) as generally applicable.)

## **Re. Structural approach**

When we apply and attitudinize a structural-calculus approach to our thinking and reasoning, we move beyond being hampered and stuck with details, definitions, and earlier abstractions. With more structural-operational up-to-date information, we more easily discover similarities in the ways different 'things' operate-behave-and relate...Adopting a structural approach leads to developing and adopting a broader, more inclusive outlook on situations. Recognizing similarities and common features, enables us to integrate information and create principles...With principles, being conscious of abstracting, and a calculus approach, we accelerate conscious time-binding. We learn more faster...We expand our knowledge and understanding of goings on.

Nations that value the method of science as the best method...so far, for continuing exploration, and refinement of their knowledge and understanding of the structures and operations of the natural world including humans and themselves as 'tribes', are likely to develop to

have a healthier, saner, socio-cultural advantage over those nations that do not.

Nations that think of "democracy" as a label for a political theory; a theory to be applied and consistently tested as an experiment in the management and control of diverse human relationships; and as an ongoing 'scientific' endeavor, to learn more about, and consciously time-bindingly improve situations--Such nations will more likely experience a healthier socio-political advantage, over nations acting, and touting, that they are already democratic; nations discouraging criticisms, and verbally skilled in persistent justification of ongoing behaviors inconsistent with the goals of a democratic experiment.

In terms of asymmetric relationship: Hackers have the advantage: Not knowing their location, they are not as vulnerable to 'attacks' by investigators, as are their easily located victims to their attacks.

Individuals who through ongoing study, and who **consistently apply** general semantics principles (including a "calculus, extensional, structural-operational-heuristic (Let's, see what happens), approach", to their thinking-feelings, reasoning, attitude, and behavior, **as epistemological standards**, will have an advantage **in the domain of clearer-creative-critical thinking (in domains where this has high value)**, over individuals who are unaware of, or do not consistently apply these principles.

Following the principle of "non-allness": Readers are invited to explore ways to apply the asymmetric relationship principle to expand their understanding, and deal with feelings of goings on they abhor.

BTW. The prediction above, on the war in Afghanistan, is not "Monday Morning Quarter Backing." The prediction was presented at an Institute of General Semantics Symposium, held in Manhattan, about 10 years or more ago. (And I have no military training. I use general semantics principles as tools to help me think about things.)

For more on general semantic principles, and as a "System": Visit <generalsemantics.org>. Read Korzybski's "Science And Sanity" and "Manhood of Humanity".

See articles at <miltondawes.com>

### **Addendum. A few words about The System General Semantics.**

As systems age, there is a tendency (through the unavoidable intervention of entropy forces), to forget and distort the original goals and concerns of the creator of the system.

Alfred Korzybski's main concern, was **The sanity of the race**. He proposed that to move in that direction, we (humans) have to adopt and follow an extensional, scientific, mathematical, structural, conscious time-binding, calculus approach, as our thinking-behavioral-relational-behavioral-life standards and guiding paradigms. He theorized this insight: **"Science and mathematics show the working of the 'human mind' at its best. Accordingly, we can learn from science and mathematics, how this 'human mind' should work *to be at its best*."** (Science And Sanity, page 728) We can think of the principles of general semantics as generalizations of the methods and approach of science and mathematics. (Science And Sanity, Page 752, 755).

From many years of study and applications, I have come to think of the system "General Semantics" as "Meta-Communication..." "Meta-Psychology"..." "Meta-Anthropology", "A Meta-Epistemology", and "Meta-Ethics".

### **Re."Meta".**

'Metasizing' involves recognition of common structural-operational features in different 'systems'...finding similarities in their differences, and integrating and incorporating these invariant features to create an

overview--a bigger system. For instance: One could study different histories to find common features, then write a meta-history...an historical overview of histories. General Semantics with its foundational principle "Consciousness of abstracting" can be characterized as a meta-system: (Abstracting) is a label, a differentiation and integration of anything we do. The system can be considered: A racial anthropological overview: a system integrating human systems (cultures, societies, tribes, nations) as "time-binding abstractions, developments, from our earlier abstractions".

### **On Meta-Communication.**

On page 46, Science And Sanity, Korzybski wrote: " The subject of this work is ultimately 'speaking about speaking'." The system can be considered a communication about communication. How we communicate with ourselves, with others, and the outside world: problems we create for ourselves resulting from a lack of awareness of the way we communicate with ourselves and with others...based on our unsubstantiated beliefs, meanings we give, or think things have, our definitions, and so on. (Note connections between meta-communication, and meta-psychology.)

The system can be thought of as a **Meta-Psychology**, a psychological overview of what different psychologies are about. We can think of psychologies as basically being about our relationship with ourselves and others. If we think of our **living (life) as something we are doing**, and that anything we do...We can do better: General Semantics as a meta-psychology provides us with semantic tools we can use, to help us to being better with ourselves, with others, in our environments, as one way we can be doing our lives better. Toward this goal: We take a calculus, scientific, extensional, structural-behavioral, heuristic (let's see what happens), conscious time-binding attitude-approach: As conscious time-binders: We do what we do...to discover what we are doing...To learn about what we are doing...To learn from what we are doing...How we can do what we think we are doing, better. (We are never doing just



one thing. Something to remember when there is talk about “unexpected consequences”. )

**As a Meta-Anthropology**: General Semantics is about the behavior of the race historically. Korzybski described humans as natural "Time-binders": In time-binding on our time-bindings, we advanced to behaving as "Conscious time-binders". As conscious time-binders, we enable ourselves to recognize (in addition to our advancement), problems and harms we create for ourselves based on natural time-binding. General Semantics is involved in General Anthropologically--not restricted anthropology in terms of the usual study of tribes: but a study of "humans, the race, as constituting a set of tribes...larger and smaller"...now called "Nations" (inhabited with smaller tribe-cults, calling themselves, or called “churches, supremacists, racists, anti-semites, misogynists, and so on'). Having institutionalized many earlier tribal attitudes and behaviors...Nations and smaller tribes, continue to behave like tribes. Language is a common and foundational factor; an invariant, creating and maintaining tribal insularity. (Read Science And Sanity, page 38, 39.)

Tribal behavior involves shared beliefs, group loyalty, us them attitude, provincialism, exclusiveness, self-promotion, etc. In the 'war against the virus' (and ourselves): Some instances of refusing to wear masks, getting vaccinated, etc., can be attributed to a tribal attitude: If one is involved with a group rejecting precautions, one is likely to go along for fear of losing friends, group activities, being seen as abandoning the group, and so on. ("Tribal behavior" should not be identified as a putdown of "tribes" in the usual anthropological sense.)

The system can be considered as **Meta-Ethics** in that it's about ways to improve human inter-relationships...towards better chances of survival. In the spirit of the calculus: **We are functions (changing relationships) of each other.** The system offers theory-principles-and a set of tools we can apply, to advance our understanding of the values, morals, we

create, and live by...and the advantages we gain in terms their possible consequences for increasing the sanity and survival of the species.

### **Abstraction. Meta-Epistemology. Consciousness of Abstracting. The 'Calculus'.**

**The notion of "abstraction"** refers to anything we 'do'...or decide not to do. Our thoughts, hesitations, anxieties, imagining, 'dreams', plans, beliefs, explanations, definitions, evaluations, philosophies, psychologies, sciences, this article, etc., can all be considered as abstractions...They do not say all. The philosopher Bernard Lonergan, S.J., in his book "Insight. A Study of Human Understanding", on page 355 wrote this: "**We speak of abstraction, and commonly we mean a direction of attention to some aspects of the given with a concomitant neglect of other aspects.**" Briefly put: We leave out. Consciousness of abstracting involves our being aware that we are leaving out. (A difficulty in writing this article, is an awareness that I am leaving out, (and have to) a great deal.)

### **As Meta-Epistemology: The Consciousness of abstracting, and the Method of the differential calculus, set epistemological limits.**

These two principles (abstractions) incorporate all the general semantics principles (self-reflexively, including themselves.) If epistemology is about the limits of knowing and understanding: One **cannot go beyond** being "Conscious of abstracting": Being "Aware, that in our thinking-feelings, our talking, descriptions, definitions, decisions, plans, beliefs, imagination, knowledge, understanding, etc., **We have not included all.**" And in our explorations and studies: "**We "Cannot go beyond taking indefinitely small steps."**"

(In the spirit of non-allness, student-practitioners of the system can introduce other factors supporting these characterizations.)

**The method of the calculus** (my favorite general semantics principle) involves no numbers or equations to solve.

On page 574, of his seminal book *Science And Sanity*, Alfred Korzybski, wrote this about the differential calculus: *It is structurally and semantically the 'logic' of sanity...*" And on page 582: "...the main importance of the calculus is in its central idea; namely, the study of a *continuous function* by following its history by *indefinitely small steps,...*" (I was intrigued; just couldn't see or make a connection between calculus (I identified as mathematics), and sanity (I identified as psychology)).

The calculus, in terms of differentiating and integrating, is going on in all areas of our existence...biological, psychological, cultural, semantic etc. We (our lives, living, relationships) are continuous functions of times-and space. We (our organisms), are differentiating and integrating in our breathing and digesting. We are differentiating and integrating when we are trying to make sense of, and 'understand' goes on...When we are describing, explaining, theorizing, solving problems, teaching, planning, reviewing, etc...We are breaking things down to smaller, more easily understood bits...We are deconstructing, (differentiating). On the other side, we assemble and construct...Like doing a jig-saw puzzle. We are constructing bigger systems from smaller systems--We integrate.

The range of our intelligence, understanding, and knowledge, in diverse domains, including our living, is a function of the degree to which we have been applying the calculus. (It took me many years to get a feel for the calculus, and make sense of Korzybski's incredible insight: "**The calculus is the logic of sanity.**")

We live in world of changing relationships (continuous functions (goings on))"...The method of the calculus offers an ideal tool for understanding goes on in such a world." (In our everyday situations and activities, we are applying (albeit non-consciously), aspects of the method: We do not deal with wholes--We break things down to smaller more manageable bits...) And we do quite well without taking indefinitely small steps. Albeit our level of understanding, knowledge, and expertise, in any domain, depends on (is a function of, is related to)

where we stop in the exploratory steps we have taken. Scientists, biologists, biochemists, neurologists, electronic engineers, and others, take much smaller steps in their studies and explorations, than we need to do in our everyday living.

In our efforts to expand and refine our knowing about, and understanding more accurately--The principles of "Consciousness of abstracting", "Non-identity", "Non-allness", "Non-elementalism", "Conscious time-binding"

--"**The method of the calculus, and other general semantics principles, set epistemological limits.** In our study of continuous functions, changing relationships goes on, any 'thing', situation, occurrence, happening etc....**We cannot go beyond taking indefinitely small steps.** We live in a world where as far as we know, everything is in relationships-and changing relationships: As individuals, we are functions of our neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic environments: our neural structures-operations, our-selves and others, our histories, languages/s, education, beliefs, and values, our family, social, cultural, economic, geographical, and other environments. We can use the calculus, guided by other general principles, to study these processes. For instance, in terms of values, and their consequences, we could study the cultural paradigm and some related effects of "Liberty and the pursuit of happiness"; "The notion of "Free Speech", and others. (For more on "neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic environments, and their influences, look up "Media-Ecology".)

### **Consciousness of abstracting.**

Whatever we are doing...We are abstracting. We cannot help abstracting. It suits us to be conscious of abstracting. In any domain: We cannot deliberately change, improve, or stop doing what we are doing, if we are not aware that, and how, we are doing. 'We' have gone to the moon, driven around, and planning to go further. Through science and mathematics, and a structural calculus approach, we have made tremendous technological advances. We could also apply the methods

and approach of science and mathematics (especially the calculus) to advance in our individual and racial relationships. But if we continue to tout how great we are...And do not take a good look at our ways of being human...We will continue on a course towards increasingly unbearable levels of insanity.

Will future tribes ever come together based on a concern for the sanity of the race!!!? I doubt this. But as individuals, we can use general semantics principles towards becoming little pockets of sanity. After all: The possible sanity of the species depends on the sanity of individual humans.

For more on General Semantics principles, and as a "System": Visit [generalsemantics.org](http://generalsemantics.org)...Read Korzybski's "Science And Sanity" and "Manhood of Humanity".

Milton Dawes/21