General-semantics can be considered a neuro-semantic, neuro-linguistic discipline. Therefore, I have found that learning the definitions and descriptions of the formulations found in Science and Sanity, staff presentations and other sources provides a necessary but not sufficient condition for developing a general-semantic orientation. Using the following material will help you to incorporate general-semantics into your everyday habitual reacting, getting it into your nervous system, thus learning it neuro-semantically.

By using general-semantics, we can learn to understand ourselves and others better. We can also learn to react-evaluate differently, if we so desire. In developing a general-semantic orientation we thus can improve our functioning.

In the material on the following pages, I summarize some of my formulating on how to approach these goals. The format of presentation is:

1. A GENERAL-SEMANTICS FORMULATION

• Some aspects of using this formulation:

  Some questions to ask yourself, and answer, that will help you to use this formulation in your day-to-day life. These questions can serve as experiments in using general-semantics: What results from asking them? What else? Etc.

  etc.

The 15 formulations which follow are:

1. Evaluational (semantic) reactions
2. Time-binding (Personal)
3. Organism-as-a-whole-in-environments
4. Map-territory relations
5. Non-identity
6. Non-absolutism
7. Self-reflexiveness
8. Consciousness of abstracting
9. Multiordinality
10. Question formulating
11. Dating
12. Indexing
13. Quotes
14. Hyphen
15. Etc.
1. EVALUATIONAL (SEMANTIC) REACTIONS

- Note total organismic reacting; my and your sensing-thinking-feeling-acting-etc.:
  - What was going on in and around me as I reacted?
  - What was I sensing?
  - What was I ‘thinking’?
  - What was I ‘feeling’?
  - What was I doing?
  - How was I moving?

- Develop an orientation of delaying reactions:
  - How can I delay my reaction?
  - When I wait to react, what happens?

- Increase response options:
  - How did I choose to react that way?
  - Can I make other choices?
  - What?
  - How?

2. TIME-BINDING (Personal)

- Note developmental life processes; changes over time:
  - How did I get this way?
  - What led to my reacting in the ways that I do?
  - What kinds of response habits have I learned and developed?
  - How can I learn to ‘date’ myself? (See “Dating” below)
  - What habits do I like?
  - What habits might I like to change?
  - How will I do this?
  - What are the first steps to changing?
  - When will I take them?

- Accept present, including myself:
  - How can I best build on my personal experiences?
  - How do I help and hurt myself and others by demanding that events, including myself, should happen differently right at this moment?
  - When I don’t accept events as they happen at the moment, does that cause them to change?
  - How does this hinder my growth?
  - What problems are created?
  - Should a flower not happen as it does?
  - Then how come I shouldn’t happen as I do?
  - How will accepting myself help me to move on?
3. **ORGANISM-AS-A-WHOLE-IN-ENVIRONMENTS**

- **Broaden awareness of what is going on, ‘inside’ and ‘out’:**
  
  *What do I sense ‘inside’ and ‘out’?*
  *What do I smell, hear, see, touch, taste, etc.?*
  *What else can I become aware of?*

- **Cope with uncertainty:**
  
  *How will having greater awareness help me to deal with whatever happens?*
  *How can this help me to experience more security, even when I can’t ‘feel’ certain about anything?*
  *How can I learn to “index” better?* (See “Indexing” below)

4. **MAP-TERRITORY RELATIONS**

- **Assume non-identity of orders of abstraction:**
  
  *Is the way I evaluate something the way it ‘really is’?*
  *Are my words the same as my non-verbal experience?*
  *Am I referring to a ‘fact’ or an inference?*
  *How can I tell the difference?*
  *What happens when I avoid the word ‘same’?*
  *Can I ever know the way something ‘really is’?*
  *If not, how might I better evaluate?*

- **Assume non-allness of abstracting:**
  
  *What might I have left out?*
  *What else?*
  *What effect does this have?* (See “Etc.” below)

- **Recognize that evaluational reactions refer to the particular person reacting:**
  
  *What about me contributes to my reacting in a certain way?*
  *What about ‘I’ gets in my ‘eyes’ as I develop my view of events?*
  *What effects does this have?
5. **NON-IDENTITY**

- Remember that your conclusions are not the same as my inferences are not the same as
  ‘facts’ are not the same as non-verbal experiencing are not the same as ‘what-is-inferred-to-be-going-on’:
  Can I ever know what some event ‘is’, apart from even my non-verbal evaluating?
  What happens when I don’t use the ‘is of identity’?
  Does what I do equal what I ‘am’, as a totality?
  Does what others do equal what they ‘are’, as totalities?
  How could I ever know what I and others ‘are’, as totalities?
  What differences will I experience when I focus on what I do rather than on what I ‘am’?
  What differences will I experience when I focus on what others do rather than on what
  they ‘are’?
  What happens when I don’t put over-generalized, over-restrictive labels, like good/bad
  and smart/stupid, on myself and others?
  Can I ever describe anything apart from my evaluating?
  What happens when I don’t use the ‘is of predications’?
  Can I ever know that something ‘is’ pretty in and of itself?
  Where are the sights I see, the sounds I hear, the aromas I smell, the flavors I taste, the
  sensations I experience located?
  What happens when I say that something looks pretty to me?

6. **NON-ABSOLUTISM**

- View formulations as hypotheses to be tested:
  How can I test this out?
  How will I know to what extent I’ve evaluated this accurately?
  Can I ever feel absolutely ‘sure’ of my evaluations?
  What does this suggest?

- Use quantifiers and qualifiers to express tentativeness:
  How does this *seem to me*?
  What happens when I use the word ‘perhaps’?
  To what *degree* does this apply?
  What happens when I avoid the word ‘same’?
  What happens when I use ‘a’ or ‘an’ instead of ‘the’?
  What happens when I use plurals in place of singular forms?
7. SELF-REFLEXIVENESS

• Take responsibility for my own reactions:
  * What happens when I say “I” instead of the rhetorical “you”?
  * When I say “you” is it you I’m talking about or myself?
  * How can I rephrase this using “I”?
  * How can I acknowledge the “to-me-ness” of my evaluations?

• Recognize multi-meanings:
  * How did I develop my idiosyncratic definitions?
  * Can there be other ways of defining-describing events?
  * How can I remember that we all have personal meanings for words and non-verbal experiences?

8. CONSCIOUSNESS OF ABSTRACTING

• Separate ‘facts’ from inferences, uncover assumptions, etc.:
  * What do I ‘mean’?
  * How do I know?
  * Can I sense what I’m talking about?
  * What observations support or negate my inferences?

• Note assumption-conclusion-behavior links:
  * What assumptions do I make about this happening?
  * What conclusions am I reaching?
  * How am I behaving?
  * What changes in my assumptions and conclusions will be needed in order to behave differently?

• Become aware of different levels of internal processes:
  * What’s going on in me now?
  * What am I ‘thinking’?
  * What memories are triggered?
  * What assumptions am I making?
  * What do I believe?
  * What images do I have?
  * What rules for living do I follow?

• Note dead-level abstracting:
  * Am I getting stuck on either higher-order or lower-order abstractions?
  * What kinds of inferences and conclusions can I draw from what I observe?
  * What do I need to observe to test my inferences and conclusions?
  * What happens when I alternate among these levels?
9. **MULTIORDINALITY**

- Recognize evaluational reactions to evaluational reactions:
  - How am I reacting?
  - How am I reacting to these reactions?
  - What happens as this process continues?
  - What happens when I get upset about my evaluational reactions?
  - What happens when I accept my evaluational reactions?
  - What happens when I focus on my current experience, rather than my past experience or anticipated future?

10. **QUESTION FORMULATING**

- Note answerability of questions asked and usefulness of answers:
  - What kind of answers do I expect when I ask this question?
  - To what extent can I feel satisfied with any answer?
  - How can I rephrase this to find out more of what I want to know?

- **Shift from “why” to “how” questions:**
  - How can I know “why” something happened?
  - How far back do I have to go?
  - What will happen when I ask “how” something happened instead of “why”?

- **Avoid complex questions:**
  - Does my question include an opinion in disguise?
  - What do I ‘mean’, e.g., when I ask, “How could I have done that?”
  - What happens when I separate this into three questions:
    1) What did I do?
    2) How did I come to do that?
    3) How do I evaluate what I did?

11. **DATING**

- Use dates to show how things change over time:
  \[ I_{1997} \text{ am not } I_{1984} \]

- **Separate past from present, look for changes over time:**
  - When did something like this happen before?
  - How did I react then?
  - How old was I?
  - How have I changed since then?
  - How have other happenings changed since then?
  - How can these changes influence how I react now?
12. INDEXING

• Use indexes to show differences within classifications:
  Seminar1 is not seminar2.

• Look for differences:
  How does this situation seem different from similar ones?
  Do these differences make a difference?
  How?

• Develop specific, detailed descriptions:
  What do I see, hear, smell, taste, touch?
  What happened?
  And then?
    And then?
  How many evaluational reactions can I list?
  What physiological sensations occur?

• Develop a multi-valued orientation:
  What happens when I give up a two-valued orientation and look for continuums instead?
  For example, what happens if, instead of labeling my reaction as anxious or calm, I rate
  the degree of anxiety or calm I experience on a scale of 1-10?
  How can I describe this?

• Focus on moment-to-moment experiencing:
  What do I notice?
  What is going on ‘inside’ of me?
  How are others reacting?

• Label what is going on as accurately as possible:
  How do I react to “whatever”?
  How can I best describe my reaction?
  How can I differentiate my reactions, e.g., distinguish anxiety from excitement?
  How do I know what my reactions ‘mean’?

• Develop an orientation of minimum expectations:
  Can I expect with certainty that someone will behave differently than usual?
  How does having more-than-minimum expectations lead me to react?
  What will happen when I have minimum expectations?

• Watch for overgeneralizations:
  Does that apply all of the time?
  When and when not?
13. QUOTES

- Use single quotes to note words that you consider elementalistc or otherwise questionable:
  What happens to my reacting when I note 'think', 'feel', 'mind', 'body', etc., instead of think, feel, mind, body, etc.? 
  How does this alert me to possible problems in evaluating?

14. HYPHEN

- Connect with a hyphen words that suggest separation of what we best understand as unified processes:
  What happens when I note my thinking-feeling instead of 'thinking' separate from 'feeling'? 
  How about mind-body instead of my 'mind' separate from my 'body'? 
  Can these ever be separated other than verbally?

15. ETC.

- Use "etc." to note non-allness:
  Is that all?
  What else?
  What else?
  Do I have it 'all' now?
  What happens when I add "etc." to the end of my communications?

ETC. ETC. ETC. ETC. ETC. ETC. ETC.
General-Semantics and Non-Verbal Awareness

Bruce I. Kodish, Ph.D. © 1997

Wishing to talk about Zen philosophy, a professor visited a Zen master. As they sat together the Zen master poured tea. He kept on pouring as the tea overflowed onto the floor. “Stop!” said the professor, “you have filled the cup, no more will go in.” The Zen master replied, “You are like that cup, full of your own ideas and speculations. If you wish to know Zen, you must first empty your cup.”

Like Zen, an important aspect of general-semantics (g-s) training involves guided practice in “emptying your cup”: looking, listening, tasting, feeling, experiencing, etc., at what Korzybski called “the silent, un-speakable level.” This includes an attitude towards living that involves an awareness of yourself as an organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment.

Some people who come to a g-s seminar-workshop expecting to learn about language use and word ‘meanings’ are surprised by this. However, g-s is not about ‘semantics’, understood as the study of linguistic ‘meanings.’ Rather, g-s involves a practical and personal study of what we call our semantic or evaluational reactions. Evaluational reactions include non-verbal as well as verbal, ‘thinking’ and ‘feeling’ responses to any events, not just words and symbols. Our focus is on internalizing some notions that can benefit our personal lives beyond the level of verbal, intellectual understanding alone.

Multiple Amphibians, Multiple ‘Worlds’

Aldous Huxley pointed out, “Every adult human being is a multiple amphibian, the inhabitant, simultaneously or by turns, of several worlds” (1972, 419). These ‘worlds’ do not occupy metaphysically separate realms. Rather, I interpret the term ‘worlds’ as metaphorically referring to important, differentiated but not separate, aspects of the universe that we participate in.

The first of these ‘worlds’ is the physical ‘world’ as postulated by natural science. Theoretically, we can understand our functioning as physico-chemical organisms within complex ever-changing physico-chemical environments. What we know about ‘world’, is inferred, i.e., not directly known in our immediate experience. We know about it through scientific theorizing tested through experimentation and observations. Scientific methods provide more or less reliable information about ourselves and our surroundings. Korzybski referred to the theoretically understood physical ‘world’ as the “event” level of existence and represented it as a parabola in his structural differential model (s.d.).

The second ‘world’ is that of sensations/perceptions which we abstract (select-construct) from events within and around us. As infants we experience ourselves fully in this sensory-perceptual ‘world’ which includes tastes, smells, sights, feelings, etc. Korzybski referred to this ‘world’ as the “silent, un-speakable, objective” level represented in the s.d. by a circle. What we know at this level is not theoretical and has a direct aesthetic value.

As we mature, we enter the third ‘world’ that we function in as ‘multiple amphibians’:
language. Korzybski referred to ‘world’ as the “verbal level”. Language allows us to further abstract from or symbolize our ‘world’ sensory experiences. The ‘world’ of language contains within it many successive levels: everyday conversation about particulars, as well as the higher-order abstractions of science, mathematics, philosophy, etc.

We can easily become entranced by this third ‘world’ of language, to the neglect of our senses. Our education system seems to put an undue focus on the verbal, symbolic realm to the neglect of the non-verbal one. Even when we exercise or play sports, we can become dominated by fixed, symbolic ideas of self-improvement or competition that prevent us from experiencing the present moment. Consistent with g-s goals, Huxley called for an education aimed at developing ourselves in the non-verbal as well as the verbal realms. How do we proceed to develop this potential within ourselves, ‘to empty our cups’?

Consciousness of Abstracting and Non-Verbal Awareness

Together, ‘world’ and ‘world’ constitute the realm of consciousness. As conscious humans, our nervous systems select-filter from ‘world’ events occurring inside, on and outside our skins in order to construct ‘world’ (sensory-perceptual) and ‘world’ (verbal) ‘maps’ of what is going on. This brain operation of ‘mapping’ experience makes up the process of abstracting.

Consciousness thus involves abstracting. We select something(s) to notice and filter out others. We give our attention to some aspect of a given situation with a concomitant neglect of other aspects. By becoming conscious that we abstract, we develop a greater ability to choose what we abstract: what we attend to and what we neglect. Such consciousness makes it less likely that we become fixed in our present set of abstractions (perceiving, labeling).

Remembering that we abstract gives us evaluational (semantic) flexibility and can help us to stay in better touch with what is going on in all of the ‘worlds’ or levels of so-called ‘reality’. This flexibility is fostered by remembering the difference between what you say (‘world’), and your non-verbal sensory-perceptual experience (‘world’). In this way you can leave the verbal, intellectual realm at times in order to more fully experience the non-verbal realm of your senses.

Pinch your ear lobe! Do it now. Now keep on pinching it and say “I’m pinching my ear lobe.” Now stop pinching your ear lobe and say “I’m pinching my ear lobe.” (You will not get any benefit from this, if you don’t actually do it. Words will not suffice!)

This experiment illustrates that the territory of the non-verbal experience of the pinch is not the same as the word-maps you use to describe it. Whatever you say about your experience, for example, “ouch!” “it hurts!” or whatever, is not it. This may seem like “baby stuff”. So why do I mention it?

Korzybski noted that we live and experience our lives on the silent, un-speakable, non-verbal level of existence. Yet talking to ourselves about our experience can seem to take up a major part of attention and consciousness. Turning down the volume of the endless chatter inside our heads
and quieting down the internal noise gives us more of a chance to receive new signals and thus to learn new things about ourselves and the world. Not only can this make us more adaptable to changing circumstances; it can also make life more fun.

I am not recommending that you eschew language altogether. Talking to yourself and others cannot and should not be avoided. Our ability to talk makes us human. Yet we need to bring ourselves frequently to the non-verbal levels of experience to look, listen, observe, etc., if we want our talking literally to make sense — a major aim of g-s training.

Remember also that our language behavior has important non-verbal aspects. For example, it seems all too easy to continue talking to oneself, preparing a response, when someone else is speaking. Practicing non-verbal awareness when listening to others involves making a decision at some point to cease rehearsing our answer to what someone says while they are talking. This means getting quiet inside and remaining open to what the other person is saying, not only to their words but also to their tone, gestures, etc.

We can also listen to how we talk to ourselves and others. Quietly observing our own speech involves another level of internal silence that can lead to useful insights about ourselves and more fruitful ways of acting.

**Experiments in Sensing**

There are also ways we can learn to talk to ourselves to help us experience the non-verbal level more fully. In the group sessions that I lead at Institute of General Semantics (IGS) comprehensive seminar-workshops, participants do experiments in sensing. These are mostly non-verbal explorations, during which each individual is helped to bring his/her attention to what’s going on within and around him/her. This is based on the work of Elsa Gindler and Charlotte Selver as taught to me by Charlotte Schuchardt Read, who led this type of session at IGS seminar-workshops for many years. During simple activities, group members are guided toward increased non-verbal awareness by means of verbal directions, mostly in the form of questions. See my ‘Sense-able Questions’ paper for examples of the types of questions that can be asked.

These sessions have as a major goal that of helping each person become more awake and present to here and now events. The work emphasizes the importance of not immediately jumping in with judgements of right or wrong but rather of accepting, although not necessarily liking, what happens. Questions asked during an experiment may include: “What more can I find out in this situation?”, “What do I need for this moment?”

Directions for an experiment in listening follow:

Spend the next few minutes letting sounds from your surroundings come to you. Notice any tendency to label what you hear or talk to yourself in any other way. How well can you put aside these labels and bring yourself back to the sounds?

After several minutes, the experiment stops and people are typically invited to share some
description of their experience. Listening to the varied responses of people to the ‘same’ experiment provides a graphic illustration of how each of us abstracts somewhat differently from the continuum of events.

Eventually one can begin to construct these kinds of sensing experiments and ask sense-able questions for oneself. There are endless experiments to do. Sensory awareness can be done anywhere, anytime: while waiting in lines, for a bus or in traffic, sitting in a lecture or at your computer keyboard, etc. When experimenting in this way you may have a concern about looking silly or childish. Remember, getting more in touch with the non-verbal world indicates that you have an admirable curiosity about what’s going on. Gently pinching your ear lobe (or finger, arm, etc.) can help you to remind yourself at these times to become quiet inside.

**Kinesthetic Awareness**

Our musculoskeletal framework and our movements constitute a major part of our reactive mechanism as organisms-as-wholes-in-environments. Our awareness of our muscles and movements is called kinesthesia. Kinesthesia or kinesthetic awareness includes our sense of muscular tension or ease, joint position, balance and movement, and involves input from muscles, joints and the vestibular system of the inner ear.

Korzybski was aware that our evaluational reactions involve various levels of ‘emotional’ tension that are both affected by and affect our neuro-muscular tension levels. Through greater kinesthetic awareness, we can learn to control our tension levels and move towards greater evaluational flexibility.

Korzybski noticed that making quiet and firm hand contact could have a visibly calming effect on “jumpy” horses and people. Following this insight, he and his associates, especially Charlotte Schuchardt Read, developed a technique which they called “neuro-semantic relaxation”.

Neuro-semantic relaxation involves a gentle handling of the soft tissues of the limbs and trunk in order to bring about a state of improved circulation and muscular tone. The individual learns to apply this method to him/herself. The result as reported is not so much a passive relaxation as an optimal state for activity.

In *People in Quandaries*, Wendell Johnson described how to do the procedure to your hands:

With one hand you simply feel the palm and fingers of the other, holding the hand gently without pinching or squeezing it, slowly and with light pressure bending the fingers under and back again, noting how the hand feels. Is it soft, warm, and dry, or stiff, cold, and moist? Do the fingers bend readily? You hold the hand with firm but light pressure for a few seconds, then release even this light pressure, then apply it again. Now you bend the fingers gently again two or three times. You reverse hands and repeat the process. That is essentially all there is to it. What it amounts to is simply feeling with one hand the state of tension of the other, and “loosening
up” the one with the other, not so much by physical pressure and active massage as by direct manual expression of calmness, ease, warmth, reassurance. It is the semantic rather than the mechanical aspect that is important. (1946, 234)

Johnson and others reported that a dedicated application of this technique seemed to encourage the ability to delay reactions, which is an important goal of g-s training.

A state of neuro-semantic relaxation and and improved ability to delay reactions can be encouraged by other approaches as well. In IGS seminar-workshops after Korzybski, Charlotte Read focused more on the sensory awareness work of Gindler and Selver to accomplish this. More recently I have been influenced both by her and through my studies of the F. M. Alexander Technique, in developing the group work that I do at seminar-workshops.

The Alexander Technique

As a young actor, F. M. Alexander (1869-1955) had an increasing tendency to lose his voice during performances. Given the possibility of having to give up his career as an actor, he decided to explore what he was doing with himself when he lost his voice. By observing himself in mirrors as he spoke, he gradually became aware that he had a persistent pattern of tightening his neck, pulling his head backwards on his neck and thus depressing his larynx when he spoke. This was part of a total pattern which he came to see included gasping and sniffing for air, thrusting his chest forward, narrowing and shortening his back, tightening his legs, and gripping his feet. The summary effect was one of a general shortening of his stature and undue compression of his joints. This general shortening occurred at other times as well but seemed especially apparent during the stress of performances; it could be controlled by specific attention to the relationship of his head, neck and back.

Alexander began to develop this control when he realized that what he did with himself was very much a function of habit. Just the thought of reciting appeared enough to set off the entire fear-based pattern of tension. He realized that he needed to bring conscious awareness into this pattern. To accomplish this he began to inhibit or stop his immediate reaction to his intention to speak, while giving his attention to what he was doing with his head, neck and back. Specifically, he would provide himself the stimulus to speak, inhibit his immediate reaction to do so and instead give himself directions “to let the neck be free, to let the head go forward and up, to allow the back to lengthen and widen”.

Through persistent self-observation he realized that what he thought he was doing with himself when he gave himself these directions was not necessarily what he in fact did do with himself. In other words, his non-verbal kinesthetic map of his actions did not fit what he saw himself doing in the mirror. He therefore made it a point not to “do” the directions he gave himself but to use them to guide his self-observation. In time he found he could more accurately sense what he was doing with himself and undo his habitual tensions and shortening.

By breaking up an action, such as speaking, into very small steps and applying the tools of
awareness, inhibition and direction, Alexander discovered a method for bringing conscious awareness and poise into everyday actions. His method of kinesthetic re-education has significant connections with g-s. Its principles inform the sessions I lead in the non-verbal awareness segment of the comprehensive seminar-workshop.

G-s involves the study of our evalutorial reactions; our total response, verbal and non-verbal, to words, symbols, and other events in terms of their ‘meanings’, significance, etc. This response has ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’, ‘self-moving’, ‘electro-chemical’, etc., aspects that intertwine inseparably. The Alexander Technique focuses especially on the self-moving or sensory-motor aspects of our evaluative reactions while not ignoring the other aspects. Alexander’s focus on the organism as a whole, kinesthetic awareness, the relation of ‘thinking’ to activity, the role of ‘emotions’ in neuro-muscular use, etc., complement and reinforce g-s concerns in these areas.

Korzybski talked about delaying our reactions as an important result/indicator of consciousness of abstracting. He noted that “Negative reactions or ‘inhibitions’ must be interpreted as the neurological foundation of ‘human mentality’...” ([1933] 1994, 356). Alexander’s application of “inhibition”, learning how to pause before and during an activity in order to observe oneself in activity and to “let the neck be free”, etc., provides a tool for directly practicing delaying our reactions on a neuro-muscular level.

Alexander Technique work provides practical experience in the physical concomitants of ‘thought’. This accords with Korzybski’s teaching of ‘thought’ as a nervous system activity of the organism. Directing my awareness especially to my head, neck and back can actually result in observable changes in functioning.

My ‘emotional’ reactions as evaluative reactions have a powerful neuro-muscular aspect that I can gain some control over by means of the Alexander Technique. Anxiety, fear, etc., have neuro-muscular concomitants that I can learn to recognize more precisely. The balanced resting state that one can learn to elicit in oneself can provide a tool for alternative reactions when experiencing some ‘emotional’ state. Of course what we say to ourselves also plays a part.

Alexander discussed an extremely important elementalism that general-semanticsists should consider. In g-s terms, an elementalism consists of the verbal separation of what does not in actuality exist in isolation. Alexander taught that the elementalistic separation of ends and means can lead us to focus on what we intend to do (the end) to the exclusion of how we do it (the means). Alexander highlighted, in particular, our neuro-muscular habits as important means upon which to remain focused. He emphasized that the neuro-muscular means in an activity conditions the end we achieve.

Conclusion

G-s is not just about developing better language habits. We evaluate as a whole on non-verbal as well as verbal levels: ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’, ‘sensing’, ‘moving’, etc. Thus, developing more consciousness of our evaluational habits and more control over them involves developing better non-
verbal as well as verbal skills. Helping each individual get a more integrated sense of him/herself as an organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment has constituted an important goal of g-s training from the beginning of IGS seminar-workshops. If you wish to know g-s, you must first "empty your cup" and thus increase your non-verbal awareness.

Works Cited


We can begin with the assumption that you begin with a set of assumptions, beliefs, generalizations, conclusions, theories, etc.; which are based on prior experiences, observations, etc.; based on prior assumptions, etc.; etc.

In dealing with a problem or situation you want to understand better and/or solve, you can follow these steps:

1. Identify your assumptions, theories, etc.

2. Clarify them by defining your terms, etc.

3. Develop clear answerable questions that you then ask in order to make observations that will help you answer them.

4. Make your observations in a calm, ‘unprejudiced’ manner.

5. Report your observations as accurately as possible and in such a way as to answer the questions that you asked to begin with.

6. Revise any assumptions, theories, etc., held before the observations were made, in light of the observations made and the answers obtained.

7. Begin again, and again, and again...

Implications of this approach include:

Our ‘knowledge’ evolves in a circular or spiral manner. You can ‘begin’ at any point in these steps when working to solve a problem. However, the decision to ask questions and make observations usually seems to arise when you encounter something unexpected, due to some problematic assumption(s) you hold.

Our conclusions are held tentatively, subject to further revision.

Our conclusions are more or less supported or refuted; nothing is ‘proven’.
These steps can be summarized by the following questions, which we do well to ask when we want to use science as a method for everyday life:

*What do I (and you) mean?* (Steps 1 and 2)

*How do I (and you) know?* (Steps 3, 4 and 5)

*What then?* (Steps 6 and 7)

What then? Practice using science as a method for everyday life and find out!

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**Notes**


Ethics: A General-Semantics Perspective

Bruce I. Kodish, Ph.D. © 1997

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Introduction
Issues such as abortion, euthanasia, informed consent, and genetic control have become more pressing as the technology of medicine has become more effective and powerful. In response to this, the field of medical ethics has evolved. As new developments occur in science, technology and social life, we can expect even more ethical problems to occur, with us as the ‘guinea pigs’. What can we derive from applying general-semantics (g-s) to these issues?

Little of an explicit nature has been written about ethics in the g-s literature. Korzybski considered ‘moralizing’, as such, useless ([1933] 1994, 296). He believed that internalizing an extensional (roughly, a ‘fact’-based) orientation would necessarily lead to more ‘ethical’ behavior. How might this happen? What ethical assumptions lie at the heart of the g-s system? How might applying g-s lead to more useful, more ethical behavior?

In this article, based on the more extensive analysis of my doctoral work (Kodish 1996), I will first briefly define the fields of ethics and g-s, then will discuss some of the ethical principles underlying g-s and finally will suggest some ways in which the principles and methods of g-s can be applied to so-called ethical problem-solving.

Ethics and G-S
Every discipline has its own burning questions. These questions help define it and lead its practitioners in their search for understanding. What burning questions define the field of ethics? I suggest this as a major defining question for the field of ethics: How ‘should’ I (we) behave? And so I’ll define ethics in the following practical way: the art of deciding what we as individuals and in society ‘should’ do when faced with competing values, circumstances, consequences, etc.

G-s, too, has its burning questions. I suggest this as a major one: How do we know what we know? Here, I view knowledge in the broadest possible sense to involve all aspects of our semantic, or evaluational, reactions (so-called ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’, ‘acting’, etc.) including verbal and non-verbal levels of experience. Following Korzybski and others, I define g-s as a scientific, and thus up-to-date and open-ended, applied epistemology or theory of knowledge (Pula 1994, xvii).

Some Ethical Assumptions of G-S
As an applied epistemology, intended for practical, personal, everyday use, g-s involves a "theory of values" (Korzybski [1933] 1994, xxxiv). It is grounded upon certain values, principles, assumptions, etc., that clearly have ethical implications. Let’s look at some of them.
**Time-Binding**

The notion of time-binding provides the basis upon which the system of g-s has been built. Time-binding consists of the characteristic human ability to use language and other symbols to transmit information across time. This allows for the formation of cultures and the ability to study cultures. It gives each individual the potential to profit from his or her own experiences and other people’s experiences. Through time-binding each generation potentially can start where the last generation left off.

The value of cooperation seems vital to us as time-binders. We build on what others have said and done, as others will build upon what we say and do. Seeing ourselves as time-binders, potential contributors to the future wealth or illth of humanity, can thus give us a sense of responsibility towards others.

In *Levels of Knowing and Existence: Studies in General Semantics*, Harry Weinberg wrote:

...Any form of thought, activity, custom, type of government, or theory is good to the degree that it fosters the development of effective time-binders; conversely, it is bad to the degree that it does not...Because the nervous system of all men are essentially the same, any custom which warps the functioning of the nervous system is bad, even if it is accepted by that society, for in the long run it will lead to its destruction. (158)

...Inherent, then, in our concept of the effective time-binder is an attitude, an ethical judgment, a moral precept as strong as any of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not knowingly warp the functioning of any nervous system.” Or stated positively, "So act as to make thyself a better time-binder; so act as to enable others to use their time-binding capacities more effectively.” (1959, 159)

We can ask what ecologist Garrett Hardin has called “the time-binding question ‘And then what?’...” (1982, 155). Asking "What then?", we can begin to consider short-term, long-term, intended and unintended consequences of our actions. Viewing ourselves as time-binders we can ask "What kind of future do we want to project? How can we behave to encourage that future?" (Kodish and Kodish, 1993, 150).

**Scientific Methods**

Another basic theme provides ethical underpinnings to g-s: the promotion of scientific methods of problem-solving. G-s teacher Wendell Johnson contended that “Korzybski’s greatest contribution to our thinking was this proposition, that the scientific method be taken out of the laboratory and be put to use in everyday life” (1972, 33-34).

Johnson wrote that a scientific approach "...reduces essentially to three questions...What do you mean?...How do you know? and What then?"(37). "I have discovered," he said, "that these three are about the most liberating questions you can imagine" (37).

Science is not value-neutral. Some current philosophers of science have begun to acknowledge a basic value of scientific inquiry that Korzybski upheld: that if we wish to live, it is better to know than not to know. This relates to the notion of the "natural order of abstracting",
which involves what Korzybski called an "extensional orientation" towards living; i.e., giving primary value to non-verbal happenings and 'facts', with the ability to use verbal higher-order abstractions as needed.

**Conditionality**

Conditionality is a basic goal of g-s training. Our actions exist on a continuum. At one pole we have unconditional or signal reactions: automatic, habitual and absolutistic. Here we identify, i.e., we treat two or more individual people, situations or times as exactly 'the same' in all respects. In this way we ignore important differences among them. With an unconditional or signal approach, we orient ourselves primarily by our static 'perceptual' and 'conceptual' maps. In doing so we can easily end up with hardening of the categories: responding to new circumstances in terms of old and stereotyped (unconditional) behavior patterns.

At the opposite pole, conditional or symbol reactions depend upon not identifying each circumstance with others in this way. Thus we recognize the individuality of different people, situations, times, etc. With a conditional approach, we continually update our 'perceptual' and 'conceptual' maps in response to the changing territories they represent. Evaluational and behavioral flexibility results.

This emphasis on conditionality brings a g-s orientation in line with the situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher (1966), which stresses flexible guidelines rather than absolute rules of ethics.

G-s provides tools for bringing a conditional, situational approach into everyday living. These give us ways of 'thinking', speaking, and reacting more suitably to changing conditions. For example, dating our evaluations reminds us of changes occurring over time. Indexing our terms and statements makes them as specific and descriptive as possible and so more likely to reflect the individuality of people and events.

**Abstracting**

In g-s, abstracting refers to an individual's nervous system process of mapping or constructing his or her experience and representing it in words and other symbols. From a g-s perspective, attributing value to anything remains a human activity resulting from the abstracting processes of each of us. Values, as such, do not exist as absolute gives outside of us. *We assign value* to objects, people, animals, fetuses, life-support systems, etc., as well as to higher-order abstractions such as principles, beliefs, so-called values, etc. The consequences of assigning values can be studied and we can modify these values accordingly. This does not result in the negation of all values. Instead, flexible values and principles result whereby we can encompass more of the complexities of human life than allowed by absolutistic approaches to ethics.

**Multi-Valued Orientation**

Such flexibility involves remembering the general-semanticist's emphasis on a multi-valued orientation: *not* either/or — *rather*, both/and. The conditional or situational decision-maker remains aware that different viewpoints can exist in a situation. Degrees of agreement
may exist in a dispute. A particular action may have a number of consequences with varying degrees of 'goodness' and 'badness'.

**Logical Fate**

Logical fate was the term Korzybski used for the notion that assumptions determine behavior. Ultimately, preferences and values function as basic assumptions by which each individual lives her or his life. At bottom, our value assumptions may not agree with those of others. Different people will function with differing, sometimes contradictory, value assumptions. Conflict may not be avoidable. Yet, if we desire agreement where possible, it seems important to understand these value differences as clearly as possible.

**Ethical Implications Of Other Formulations**

In g-s, elementalism refers to the verbalistic splitting up of what is not so divided in whatever we talk about. If we elementalistically split ethics from other concerns, we err. If ethics involves making decisions among competing values, circumstances, consequences, etc., then ethical considerations of some sort, either trivial or serious, permeate every aspect of living. I suggest that ethical considerations permeate every aspect of g-s as well. I invite you to consider some of the other formulations of g-s. What values do they presuppose? What ethical implications do they lead to?

**How Can G-S Contribute To Ethical Decision-Making?**

Finally, I'd like to present one important g-s tool for use in our discussions of medical ethics issues: the distinction between two kinds of statements: fact and inference.

In ethical disputes, statements about values, 'feelings', etc., can easily involve confusing inferences with statements of fact. This occurs, for example, when I make a so-called value judgment of the form "x is 'good', 'bad', 'evil', 'unnatural', 'immoral', 'unethical', etc." or that "y is 'good', 'virtuous', 'moral', etc."

Statements like these have the superficial appearance of descriptive reports, statements of fact. However, statements like these will more likely involve inferences. Statements of inference go beyond a given set of facts. We must make inferences if we wish to draw conclusions, make decisions, etc. However, if made uncritically by confusing them with descriptive statements of fact, inferences can mislead us.

If I say "abortion is murder" my statement reads like a descriptive statement about abortion. But it says more about me and my personal values than it does about abortion. In making this statement, I incorrectly project or allocate to abortion what more accurately pertains to myself. This kind of uncritical inference provides the basis for many forms of absolutistic ethics.

I may more accurately take responsibility for my own value judgments by saying that "I find x good," "I consider y unethical," "I prefer z," etc. I can thus turn an uncritical inference
into a statement of fact about my own values and preferences. It also seems more accurate to eschew terms like ‘evil’, ‘unnatural’, etc., that project the source of my judgments outside of myself.

Rather than elementalistically dichotomizing ‘fact’ and ‘value’, as some philosophers have done, it appears more accurate to recognize that in saying "I prefer or value y over x" I make a statement both of ‘fact’ and ‘value’. I can consider it a ‘fact’ that "I prefer or value y to x."

In discussions on medical and other ethical issues, I encourage you to turn statements about your own values, preferences, etc., from uncritical inferences into descriptive statements about yourself.

Each of us abstracts differently. Each of us starts from more or less differing assumptions. Some conflict will occur. As we look for agreement, we do well to remember to give up the search for complete agreement. However, let us seek what agreement we can by uncovering and clarifying our own values and helping others to uncover and clarify theirs.

Taking ownership of your own values provides an important first step to examining and possibly revising your values. To do this you can follow a principle well stated by g-s-inspired author, Robert Anton Wilson: "Make your demands explicit...and then you and the other guy can negotiate meaningfully" (1986, 32).

Recognizing the distinction between fact and inference statements also allows us to see how we can get to judgments or inferences about what we ‘should’ or ‘ought’ to do from a given set of facts, which, as I have argued here also includes our values.

This appears to violate the famous "is-ought distinction" which many philosophers attribute to Hume. The is-ought distinction involves the notion that "...judgements that one ought to do something, cannot be derived logically from judgements that such and such is the case" (O’Hear 1985, 256).

It seems useful to remember the distinction between statements of fact and ought statements or injunctions which function as inferences. As implied by Hume’s distinction, to say that "These apples ‘are’ bitter" doesn’t automatically lead to "You shouldn’t eat any of these apples!"

However, we can get to some conclusions about what we ‘should’ do by a form of ethical reasoning that George Smith has called a practical syllogism (1979, 294). In this kind of argument, factual statements connect with an injunction by means of a conditional if-then statement, based on a value that someone holds: "If you don’t want to get sick, you musn’t eat bitter apples."

The complete practical syllogism reads as follows: These apples ‘are’ bitter. Bitter apples can make you sick. If you don’t want to get sick, you musn’t eat bitter apples. You (I) don’t want to get sick. So don’t eat any of these apples!
Thus from statements of facts (which include value-facts as I have described them) we can infer what we 'should' do. Paul Kurtz has called such ethical reasoning "act-duction" (1992, 297-298). He writes that "...we infer the actions that are most appropriate -- we act-duce -- given the valuation base at hand. On the basis of this, some choices may thus be said to be more reasonable in the situation than others" (298).

Just as from a g-s perspective we need to take responsibility for our values as our values, we also need to take responsibility for our ethical inferences as our inferences. Different individuals presented with a particular set of circumstances and their own particular values may arrive at different ethical inferences. Remaining conscious of abstracting, let us strive for agreement when we can reach it and accept when we don't.

I invite you to remember this as you seek ethical solutions using the tools and formulations of general-semantics.

Works Cited


LEARNING AND USING THE LINGO

by Milton Dawes (1991)

It usually takes a while to get a 'feel' of general-semantics as an integrated system of interrelated principles. It usually takes even a longer while to develop a level of general-semantics internalization, where the principles 'apply' themselves at those difficult and trying times, when we need them the most. And when at conscious levels, we are least inclined to think of principles and formulations.

One way to get a 'feel' of general-semantics, and develop a general-semantics orientation, is to create, study, and include in our usual thinking-feeling processes, a vocabulary of general-semantics terms. In Science and Sanity, Alfred Korzybski stressed the importance of acquiring and using a general-semantics vocabulary ... if we are to benefit from the discipline. Here is some of what he wrote:

"The reader will find in this work the use of certain terms which, although they are standard English words, are not habitually used. The terms used here have been carefully selected and tested, and found to be more similar to the structure of the actual facts. The power of terminology, because of its structural implications, is well known in science, but is entirely disregarded in our daily neuro-linguistic habits." (p. xxxvi)

"That languages as such, all have some structure or other is a new and, perhaps, unexpected notion. Moreover, every language having a structure, by the very nature of language, reflects in its own structure that of the world as assumed by those who evolved the language. In other words, we read unconsciously into the world the structure of the language we use." (p. 60)

"The main issues are found in the structure of language, and readers who are interested in this work will facilitate their task if they make themselves familiar with these new terms and use them habitually." (p. 64)

In building your vocabulary and familiarizing your 'selves' with these terms, I suggest that you don't try to find out what they mean - instead, build on whatever you understand from your readings, studies, and inquiries, by looking to your own experiences, and reports from others, for situations that you could say represent examples of this or that general-semantics principle.

I do not recommend that you actually use these terms in conversations. This could be very disturbing to your loved ones, relatives, friends, co-workers, and others ..... and probably give general-semantics a bad name. You could think of these terms as 'silent counselors', 'friendly companions', that you can call on to help you avoid many of the identification traps in your thinking-feeling-evaluating processes; in your conversation with your 'selves' and others; in your interpretations of your own experiences and the stories of the experiences of others; in your interpretations of what you hear or read ... and so on.
The practice of awareness is an effective way of keeping in touch with the goings on in our inner world - the world around us.

Awareness is one of the most important keys to becoming better managers of our everyday interpersonal, intrapersonal, social, professional, and domestic interactions. The practice of awareness gives us information about ourselves in our environments. It enables us to better see ourselves, hear ourselves, understand ourselves, know ourselves, take charge of ourselves.

The practice of awareness opens up a way for us to recognize the connections between what we do and how we do what we do, and the effects of this on those we come in contact with, and the situations we find ourselves in - and most important of all, how all this in turn affects us at a later time.

The practice of awareness helps us to recognize that a good deal of our joy and misery, satisfaction and disappointments, understandings or confusions cannot be blamed on others or circumstances, but depends on our attitudes and approach, our knowledge and beliefs, our fears and desires....a good deal depends on us.

The following is a set of simple exercises designed to help you develop greater awareness. Select one every now and again and record your experiences.

- Watch people walking.....notice the variety of walking styles.....notice your own walking style.....silently, without judgments.

- See if you can catch yourself using one of the following words: always...never...true...false...fact...wrong...right...should...only...normal...perfect...exactly...bad...equal...same. ought...know...Make an effort to justify to yourself your use of these words.

- When you touch, or remove something, try to replace it “exactly” the way you found it ... so that no one would know that it was disturbed.

- Whenever you enter a room, do a stock-taking exercise...look around and take note of the furniture ... fixtures ... paintings ... equipment ... people ...

- Every now and again, listen to the various sounds around you ... see how many you recognize ...

- Listen to yourself talking ... identify the times when you find yourself describing things ... making assumptions ... seeking information ... asking questions ... disagreeing ... criticizing ...
In becoming familiar with, and in using these terms, you will quickly find to your delight, that they provide us with a common vocabulary; one that we can use to help us acknowledge and appreciate our similarities and differences; one that can help us resolve our conflicts and disagreements; and one that can help us better understand our ‘selves’, others, and our worlds.

The following is a list of some of the more commonly used general-semantics terms. I encourage you to add more terms to the list. And make the effort to continually expand your understandings of these terms through your inquiries and experiences.
• Wear your watch or ring on a different hand...notice how uncomfortable a simple change can be...

• Notice which shoe you put on or take off first ... make a switch ...

• In going some place you usually go to ... take another route ...

• Notice which part of your body you touch first when you take a bath ...

• Notice which foot you lead with, while walking, or when you step on to a flight of steps ...

• See if you can discover the times when you are most aware ... or unaware ...

• Make a graph and plot your mood for each hour of a day, using the following scale:

   ....Feeling Low.....Tense.....Angry.....OK.....Fine.....Great.....Fantastic.....

• See how many things around you that you don’t understand the workings of ...

• When next you go someplace, (the office, a party, to visit a friend, etc.) decide on an arrival time one day ahead: try to be there within 5 minutes of time selected. (It is important to select a specific arrival point - greeting your host, entering the door, etc.). Notice the things, situations, people (including yourself) that affect your timing.

• Create some exercises of your own to add to this list. Think of these exercises as a brain game.
THE WEDGE OF CONSCIOUSNESS:
A Self-Monitoring Device.

While awake, we are most times asleep to ourselves and to what’s going on around us. With some effort, determination and practice, we could be more awake. The “wedge of awareness” (woa), or “wedge of consciousness” (woc) is a management tool we can use to increase our wakefulness. For what reasons do we need to be more awake you ask? Well for one: in a world of change and diversity, the more asleep we are, the more out of touch we are with what we are doing; the more unaware we are likely to be of consequences; and the more unaware we will be regarding how what we are doing is affecting us and others; the less opportunity we will have to recognize how often we create our own problems, and so on.

The “wedge of consciousness” or “wedge of awareness” arose from simple origins – a wedge we usually use as a door stop. Among other uses, a wedge functions to hold something open or stop something from moving about. The shape of the wedge is important in terms of its use. The thin edge facilitates access and offers less resistance and less disturbance than the thicker edge. These are important factors in a world where the more we attempt to change or disturb something, the more resistance we are likely to encounter.

So now imagine a wedge (the kind usually used as a door stop). Let the thin edge of the wedge represent an instant – a very tiny increment of psycho-logical and chronological time. Now recall those times when in a situation you might have said “Wait a minute,” or “Hold on,” or “Let me think about this,” “Hey, what’s happening here?”, “What am I doing?”, “I can’t believe I am saying this, or doing this” or “I can’t believe I said that, or did that” and so on. The exact words are not important here. It has to do with the time-binding folk wisdom expressed in the phrase “count to ten”. Now remember we are talking here of an “instant of self-awareness”. An instant of awareness that allows us to say to ourselves: “Whoa.” An instant of our time when we can “woc” ourselves into another mode of self-conscious awareness, and enable us to change approaches, attitudes, directions, and so on.

Now let’s move up the wedge from the thinner to the thicker parts. This expansion up the wedge, can be related to expanding the symbolism, significance and usefulness of the instant. So in this expansion the instant of self-awareness can now extend to include the following. The very edge of the wedge can be thought of as “A Decision Point” – an “Opportunity for a Change in Direction.” Going towards the thicker parts can represent, I can stop what I am “thinking”, saying, doing, and so on. I can decide that it’s okay to continue what I am ‘thinking’, saying, doing, etc. I can decide to modify or change what I am doing. I can decide to re-view and re-evaluate what I am doing; and so on.

The instant of self-awareness can also be likened to the jerk that a horse is given to signal a change in direction or movement. In other words our nervous systems (as an automatic self-evaluating and self-protective action) from time to time, pull us up short; jerk us into awareness from being submerged into whatever behavior we were indulging in at that time. When this happens, it’s up to us to “move up the wedge” as suggested above, and take advantage of the opportunity; and put the instant to good use. The “semantic pause”, “the wedge of awareness” is something each one of us can experience and explore for ourselves. It sometimes comes as a feeling like a “mini shock”, and a “jerk”. I believe that each one of us, has at some time or the other experienced this “jolt”. What I am doing here is giving a label, and signifying these occurrences, as “important and general self-management opportunities”.

As mentioned above these “woas” come automatically. But we can increase the frequency of these “woas” through training ourselves in being more self-aware. This includes being more aware of what we are ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’, saying to ourselves, saying to others, writing, doing, worrying about, dreaming about, hearing, and so on. Without these instances of awareness (pauses, woas) we have little chance to change, or improve ourselves or our management of a situation. We have little chance of developing skills in general-semantics or any other discipline.

Developing in a discipline involves continuing monitoring for the “non-discipline,” automatic, habitual behaviors, and behaving according to the requirements of the discipline. Learning to do something often involves doing things differently, and doing different things than we have been doing. This is not easy. In terms of the principle of “least action,” we are more likely to continue along automatic behavior tracks than to “woa” or “woc” ourselves and change. (If you are presently working at quitting smoking, or dropping a habit, or developing a habit; or can remember times when you were working at some kind of change, then you will easily recognize the difficulties of change).

One way to increase the frequency of your “woas” or “wocs”, is to carry some little item in your pocket or handbag, as an external reminder. Or wear a ring on a different finger; or a watch on a different hand. Every now and again, you will see these objects, or feel the discomfort of having them in not usual places. This will give you the opportunity to ask yourself questions like the following: “Where am I at this moment?” “What am I doing?” “What am I supposed to be doing?” “How am I doing what I am doing?” “What am I ‘thinking’ or ‘feeling’?” “Do I want to indulge in this kind of thinking-feeling?” And others you will formulate for yourself. After a while, your habit forming nervous system will incorporate this new practice and it will become automatic. In other words, with sufficient practice, without further effort on your part, you will find that your “woas” (not woes) and “woc” show up with increasing frequency. And the external reminder will have served its purpose. (By the way: we seem to be able to “woe” others with greater ease and frequency than we “woc” ourselves. Let’s practice “woccing” ourselves first. I ‘think’ you will agree that it’s only fair to check up on ourselves first; to be involved in correcting ourselves first; to be involved in improving ourselves first – before doing it to others).

We were born into, and are immersed in, particular environments (cultural, language, home, religious, social, work, etc.). Our behaviors are usually automatic responses, generated by our uncritical acceptance and conditioning, by the demands and expectations, from these environments. The “woa of consciousness” gives us a chance to move from automatic, unwanted, unproductive, stress producing behaviors, toward more creative, self-directed and self-managing behaviors.

Without an awareness of what we are doing; and how we are doing what we are doing; without some internal self-monitoring process; we have little chance of making necessary adjustments and corrections towards improving ourselves in chosen areas of activities. We need the occasional “wedge of awareness.” And we need to “woc” ourselves out of automatic self-distressing behaviors, into more satisfactory ways, more imaginative ways, healthier ways, more intelligent ways of being with ourselves and others.

Milton Dawes/96


'TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR
THE MEANINGS WE GIVE'

by Milton Dawes

Proposition 1

"Whenever we agree or disagree with someone – or, to be more specific, with something – we have heard or read, we are to a great extent agreeing or disagreeing with ‘ourselves’." (I invite you to pause for a moment and take special notice of your reactions to this proposition at this time.) This proposition, at first hearing or reading, may seem to you to be a silly, irresponsible, and totally unacceptable thing for anyone to suggest. And you may also think that an idea such as this is designed simply to discourage genuine criticisms, undermine self-confidence, and put a damper on debates, discussions, and everyday conversations. I doubt that any of this will happen; but in any case, those are not my intentions. I am merely stating what seems to me to be a valid proposition, based on my acceptance, interpretations, and applications of some general semantics principles and formulations.

Proposition 2

The aim of Proposition 1 is mainly to provide supporting arguments for Proposition 2. Proposition 2 states that "If we are concerned to improve our relationships with our ‘selves’ and each other, and create healthier environments in homes, in the places we work, and wherever we socialize, we could start by becoming more alert to how we as individuals contribute to and create the kinds of societies we live in, as a consequence of the ways we interpret and give meanings to our experiences. And since language constitutes a great deal of our thinking related to our everyday personal, social and professional experiences and interactions, we could take more responsibility for the ways we interpret, and the meanings we give to, what we hear, read, see, experience, etc.”

Specifically, we could take more responsibility for how we as individuals interpret and give meanings to what our experts, gurus, scientists, religious authorities, politicians, teachers, friends, reporters, writers, relatives, and others say or write. For the kinds of values we hold, the ways we relate to each other, and the kinds of societies we create for ourselves and our children are, to a great extent, based on the ways we interpret, and the meanings we give to, what we read and hear.

The Principle of Non-Identity

To return to Proposition 1: One of the general-semantics principles alluded to earlier is the “principle of non-identity.” This principle states that no two things are identical, that no things are the same, that no two things are similar in all respects. The principle of non-identity further states that “In a world of change, growth, process, changing relationships . . . a thing is not even identical with itself.” Now if things are not identical with themselves, if they are continuously changing ever so imperceptibly from moment to moment – changing position, changing
relationships, changing internally, and so on – how can they ever be identical with each other? In which instant, for example, could we look at the sweep hands of a watch and say it is exactly such and such time?

The principle of non-identity is valid on both logical and empirical grounds. If any two things were similar in all respects, then, by definition and observation, they could not occupy or be seen to occupy two different space-time positions. If two things were identical (similar in all respects), we would not in any way be able to distinguish one from the other. We would not be able to point to one and say, “There is this one,” then point to the other and say, “There is that one.” To do that would be tantamount to admitting that one could be distinguished from the other and that they were seen in different places. But if each one occupied a different place, then their positional and functional relationships with other things would be different. So one could not honestly claim that they were similar in all respects.

We are strongly inclined, each one of us, to ignore these inescapable differences between the interpretations and meanings we give to what we hear and read, and the words, intentions, expectations, and meanings of a speaker or writer. If we accept the principle of non-identity, then the meanings and interpretations of a listener or reader cannot be identical with – cannot be the same as – the meanings of another individual, speaking or writing in a different place and at a different time. We choose, interpret, and understand words according to our individual life experiences and we each have different life experiences. Of course we do understand each other, to a certain degree, and we can follow instructions reasonably closely. We are able to communicate mainly because our meanings have overlapping features. But except for those who claim to be mind-readers, our interpretations come between what is said and heard and what is written and read. To be fair to a speaker or writer, as listeners or readers, we should take some responsibility for the interpretations we make and the meanings we give to what we hear or read.

The Principle of Non-Allness

The principle of non-allness is another general-semantics principle advanced in support of Proposition 1. Briefly put, this principle states, “We cannot know, understand, become acquainted with, all of – nor say, describe, imagine, . . . all about anything,” and this includes ourselves. The principle implies that, as interpreters, evaluators, and assigners of meanings, we cannot be absolutely certain of every aspect of our own evaluation processes; consequently, we cannot be sure of the accuracy of our own interpretations, nor can we know all that’s behind the words of others. Accepting and remembering the principle of non-allness, we have the responsibility at least to make allowances for the possibility of errors, miscalculations, and misinterpretations. It is our responsibility to remind ourselves that all was not said or written, and that all could not have been said or written. It is our responsibility to remember that any interpretation we make, any meaning we give to what we hear or read, is based on very small samplings of whatever else could have been said or written. And it is our responsibility to remind ourselves that our agreements as well as disagreements are based on our evaluations of our interpretations of these small samplings.
The General Principle of Uncertainty

This principle is more general than Heisenberg’s principle of uncertainty. It states, “Living as we do, in a dynamic world of change, growth, process, etc., and in a world where no two things, situations, etc., are identical, the ‘truth’ value of the relatively static and general statements we make should be evaluated in terms of degrees of probability ranging from impossibility to certainty.” As an exercise, how, for instance, would you evaluate the truth value of the following statements? (The first one was seen in a bank.) “I pay back my loan the way I want.” “He is on the permanent staff.” “Till death do us part.” “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?” “Your car will be ready tomorrow.” “Five hundred dollars cash back.”

If you refer to what was mentioned above regarding the principles of non-identity and non-allness, you may notice that these two principles (among others) ‘make’ a general principle of uncertainty inexorable. The principle of non-identity implies that to understand anything there have to be some prior interpretations. And, following this, we cannot be absolutely sure that what we understand is precisely what was meant. The principle of non-allness implies that all our understanding is based on limited analysis of limited input of limited information. So we cannot be absolutely sure that the way we have interpreted a statement precludes all other possible interpretations. (The “allness” — that is, all our understanding — in the above statement and implied in other general-semantics principles is not a contradiction or paradox if one includes a date.)

The principle of uncertainty, together with those of non-identity and non-allness, “suggest” that we develop in ourselves certain attitudes, habits, orientations, approaches in our conversations, discussions, listenings, and readings. Such a habitual approach would include the following considerations. (1) We cannot not interpret, we cannot not make assumptions. (2) We should expect some degree of inaccuracy in our interpretations — based as they are on our individual experiences, standards, assumptions, beliefs, and training. (3) We should acknowledge these inaccuracies, assumptions, and uncertainties as unavoidable aspects of our communication processes.

In support of this “uncertainty approach,” we could change our agreement or disagreement responses to something along the following lines: “As far as I know; as much as I understand; based on the little information I have; not knowing what was left out; realizing that I had to make a few guesses and projections; I agree (or disagree) with my own interpretations of this that I am hearing (or reading); furthermore, since I do not expect people to say or write ‘meanings’ instead of ‘words,’ I take responsibility for the meanings I give to whatever I hear or read.” (Remember, we are talking about an attitude, so we don’t have to actually say the above.)

The societies we have inherited, help to create, and to a great extent support, do not usually encourage values pertaining to uncertainty and probability. So it is understandable if at this point you find that your thoughts include such words and phrases as ludicrous, idealistic, academic,
philosophical, nothing would ever get done. We have been conditioned to believe, we are inclined to believe, and we have abundant evidence that leads us to believe that a person with an uncertainty approach will be seen, described, thought of, and treated something like this: “She or he is the kind of person who is unsure of herself or himself; can’t be relied upon; is wimpish; splits hairs; lacks self-confidence; seems a weak character or a fence sitter; cannot make decisions.”

Despite our social and cultural conditionings, we can also consider the following positive aspects of uncertainty. The principle of uncertainty is not an absolute law of the universe, stating what must occur, what we must do at every single instant of our existence. Without some degree of certainty, there would be no science or mathematics as we know them. To recognize a principle of uncertainty is to learn to live our lives with a certain degree of uncertainty. In a world of change, process, and diversity, to be always certain is to be at a disadvantage. Following a map of certainty will sooner or later lead one up a path to increasing distress, while being uncertain helps us to acknowledge errors and to seek improvements. Being certain discourages creative approaches to solving problems; it promotes intolerance, prejudices, conflicts, and violence. Without doubts, there would be little advancement in knowledge. A recognition of the possibility of uncertainty helps us to accept more responsibility for our guesses, expectations, theories, and opinions. An individual or society that has no doubts about its certainties will sooner or later discover, to its dismay, that the world around it, and the people it encounters, cannot always be relied upon to meet its expectations.

Words as Variables

There are other general semantics premises and formulations that could be cited in support of Proposition 1. For now, those mentioned above will suffice. Let’s return for a moment to Proposition 1: “Whenever we agree or disagree with something we have heard or read, we are to a great extent agreeing or disagreeing with ourselves.” The “truth” value of this proposition has very little to do with whether one person is right and another wrong, or whether what is heard or read can be shown to be true or false. The “truth” value of the proposition has to be evaluated in terms of interpretations understandings, and meanings, not in terms of facts per se.

Apart from the premises referred to, Proposition 1 can be supported using the mathematical notion of “the variable.” The variable has been defined as “a symbol that can represent any one of a set of values.” Words can be considered as “semantic variables.” In terms of process, time, space, context, frame of reference, interpreters (anything, for that matter) can be thought of in terms of variables. Any thing, situation, experience, or event is usually given a wide variety of interpretation and meaning values. As an unavoidable consequence of our unique life experiences, words mean different things to each of us. If you can recall situations where you thought you were misquoted or misunderstood, or followed directions to an unfamiliar place, or struggled with an instruction manual, you will have a good understanding of words as variables.

Interpreting: An Automatic process
We are not usually aware that we give our own meaning values to our experiences, or to what we hear or read. We make interpretations and give meanings without being aware that we are doing so. We are constantly making interpretations – it is an automatic process. Our nervous systems seem to work more efficiently by not requiring us at self-conscious levels to be constantly engaged in observing that we are making interpretations. Try to imagine what it would be like if every time we had an experience, or heard or read something, we immediately became aware that we were in a process of interpreting! This awareness would now in its turn become an experience to be interpreted. And this new awareness . . . get the picture? This extreme, self-reflexive mode of interpreting our experience of interpreting would probably put us in a trance-like state. It would be very difficult to make decisions or act.

The complexities of modern living require us to become more mindful of the fact that we interpret and give meanings. As diverse societies and cultures come together; as individuals and groups speaking different languages meet, intermix, and interact; as individuals with different training and skills communicate and work with each other – their different meaning-based values clash. Not unexpectedly, confusions, prejudices, tensions, and conflicts tend to increase.

Increasing our awareness that things are not what we say they are, that the meanings we give to our experiences and to situations we find ourselves in are uniquely our meanings, that words mean different things to different people, would do much to lower tensions, clarify differing viewpoints, and improve the quality of our relationships with ourselves and each other.

**No Direct Access to Meanings**

We have no direct way of knowing what others mean by their words. We have no way of bypassing the intrusive, selective, differentiating, integrating, representational processes of our nervous systems. Nor do we presently have any way of knowing how much, and to what degree, we may or may not have added to, subtracted from, reconstructed, reshaped, distorted, or created any such meaning. How can we know how much our fears, hopes, expectations, prejudices, or values have contributed to the particular ways we observe, think about, and respond to situations? If we can’t be sure that what we understand is what was meant, shouldn’t we take some responsibility for the meanings we give?

**Exploring “Meaning”**

If we are to take responsibility for the meanings we give to what we read or experience, it would be helpful to do some explorations into the realms of meaning. Such explorations would deepen our understandings of meaning and sharpen our sensitivities to the importance of meaning in diverse areas of our everyday living. What follows is a very brief account of some of my explorations. The statements, however else they may be interpreted, should not be taken as conclusions but rather as propositions. They represent some aspects of what “meaning” means to me at the time of writing.
Dictionaries give the "meanings" of words through references to other words. But remembering the times we have felt hurt, angry, put down, encouraged, or complimented by what someone said or wrote, we suspect that meanings have more to do with our lives than merely with other words in a dictionary.

"Meaning" is a high-order abstraction label for our attempts to build bridges between what we know (or think we know) and what we know we don't know — bridges between the data that come to us through our senses and whatever else we suspect is going on in and around us. Our unceasing and pervasive search for meanings provides us with undeniable clues — messages from "our-selves" to "our-selves" — that we do not know it all.

Meaning represents our search for patterns that would provide us with some sort of continuity between events and our experiences, in different times and different places. Meaning has to do with our individual attempts to make sense of what we experience going on in our inner and outer worlds. We look for relationships, patterns, and connections to satisfy our need to know and understand what's going on; we look for clues that will help us get along better, obtain what we want, avoid problems, lessen stress, improve performance, and make better plans and decisions.

Nothing in or of itself has meaning. No thing, event, experience, situation, or word is its own meaning. Meanings cannot be divorced from interpretations and interpreters. The meaning or meanings of anything will not be found in the thing. The meaning of a sound, painting, piece of music, dream, or statement will not be found in the sound, or music, or statement. If the meaning of a thing was a part of the thing, how would we know where the "meaning" ended and the thing began? "Meaning" refers to processes in psycho-physiological environments. Features of these environments include curiosity, surprise, anger, prejudice, opinions, beliefs, humor, fear, attitudes, values, and so on. Meaning does not exist in geographical environments as such; we cannot point to a meaning.

Each one of us creates our own meanings. And since each of us has our own unique ways of seeing, experiencing, and thinking about things and situations, no two of us will give the same meanings to situations we find ourselves in or to words we have heard or read. In view of all this, it would seem more reasonable for us to ask, "What does this mean to me?" than to ask, "What does this mean?"

Because words do not have meanings in themselves, we attempt to bridge the enormous gap between what we hear or read and what is intended by a speaker or writer. Frequently, we confuse and identify what we feel and understand, generated by what we hear or read, with whatever message a speaker or writer intended to convey.

In a world of infinite numbers of relationships, where everything (as far as we know) is dynamically interrelated with other things, a world where not all of these relationships are known or can be known, human meanings (despite our tendencies to hang onto the familiar and
traditional) cannot be final or complete. As we get to know more about ourselves, our world, and ourselves-in-our-world, what things mean to us changes. As we see more, hear more, travel to new places, meet and talk with people, and acquire skills, the ways we "see" things change – despite our beliefs that we are the "same" persons.

If we accept that situations, behaviors, or statements do not have meanings in and of themselves, then we cannot reasonably and responsibly say that anything is "meaningless." Saying that something is meaningless is another way of saying that it does not mean anything to us at this time. We can, if sufficiently motivated, make sense of and give meanings to anything we choose.

Because meaning has to do with our deep need to find continuity and consistency in ourselves and in our worlds, the meanings we give are interrelated, integrated, and coordinated. The meanings we give to our experiences, or to what we hear or read, depend a great deal on the meanings we have given both to other experiences and to other things we have heard and read. This integration and consistency of meanings makes it extremely difficult for us to change attitudes, prejudices, beliefs, values, and behaviors, even when we realize that it is to our advantage to do so.

Recognizing that meaning is so vital in all areas of our lives, that things are not what we or others say they mean, that we have the inalienable option to change our interpretations as we please, could greatly increase our levels of self-confidence and personal power. We could accelerate our personal development, increase our intelligence, and improve our personal and professional relationships by being more sensitive to, more sensible about, and more responsible for the ways we interpret and the meanings we give to our experiences and to what we hear or read. "Easier said than done," you may be thinking. (Since I said it myself, I agree with me.) As mentioned before, making interpretations and giving meanings are basically automatic processes. But with some practice, we can become more aware of these goings-on. It requires catching ourselves doing such things as explaining, giving opinions, criticizing, expecting things to happen in particular ways, and agreeing and disagreeing.

Meaning plays an enormous role in our lives. To repeat, meaning is not just a matter of words. Our values, prejudices, beliefs, sciences, philosophies, religions, and artistic activities are based on meanings. We live our lives in terms of meanings. The kinds of societies we create and support develop from the interpretations and meanings we give to our experiences, especially to what we hear and read. "Meanings," to a great extent, direct our lives. But since we are capable, to some degree, of recognizing, reviewing, and modifying our interpretations, we can also direct our meanings to some extent.

**The Guessing Game**

Let's return once again to Proposition 1: Whenever we agree or disagree with something we heard or read, we are to a great extent agreeing or disagreeing with ourselves. How do you now
feel about Proposition 1? Do you agree? If your answer is “Yes,” here is another question. What are you agreeing or disagreeing with – the words as you have read them or the words as you now understand them? Suppose Proposition 1 were expressed in a foreign language with words you could pronounce but did not understand. Would you agree or disagree? If you are still puzzled, here is how I arrived at Proposition 1.

When I read or listen to someone speaking, I am aware (sometimes) that I do not and cannot know what message or messages the words are intended to convey. I am aware (sometimes) that I do not know the feelings, expectations, motives, or attitudes represented by the words. So I make some guesses (without necessarily being aware that I am doing this). I arrive at some understanding based on my past experiences as well as my present beliefs and expectations. (This takes place at non-self-conscious levels.) My agreement or disagreement expresses my evaluation of my understanding. (This I am sometimes aware of.)

If you disagree with the communication processes as outlined above (as you understand from the words), consider this: How comfortable would you be if you knew that anyone could read your mind” and know exactly what you were thinking or feeling? It certainly would be a different kind of world, “don’t you think?”

Taking Responsibility

If we could read each other’s minds directly and completely, our human worlds would probably be healthier places. But as this is not the case, we’ll have to do the best with what we have. As far as we know, our communication processes necessarily involve interpretations. Based on our interpretations, we arrive at meanings. Our meanings are expressed through our feelings, attitudes, prejudices, beliefs, values, etc. The kind of society we help to create and support, our relationships, our social institutions, and so on, all depend on our attitudes, beliefs, values, and the like. We are not animals. We do not live our lives entirely according to instinctive urges. Our societies are based on interpretations and meanings. We have some measure of control over the ways we interpret things. With a certain degree of alertness, we can recognize and, if necessary, review, modify, and change our interpretations. We are self-reflexive beings. We have the abilities to correct and improve our interpretations toward probable higher “truth” values.

It is easy for us to blame the politicians, the system, the corporations, the media – anyone but ourselves – for our social and other problems. We don’t usually acknowledge the parts we play – how we, through the meanings we give, contribute to the problems we complain about. We could put much more effort into improving our thinking toward becoming more critical thinkers and interpreters. Applying such general-semantics principles as non-identity and non-allness could help us a great deal to improve our thinking about our thinking. We need to ask “our-selves” more often the question, “How do I know that what I believe is so?” For our own well-being, we need to remind “our-selves” more often that there are intrinsic differences between what we believe and what is going on.

ALL IN ALL THAT'S NOT ALL

by Milton Dawes

We might think of general-semantics principles and formulations as "semantic ABMs" – *attitudinal and behavioral modifiers* – based on an explicitly stated critical thinking frame of reference and generated from empirical data. Individuals who use these principles and formulations in their activities and interactions with others (and within themselves), provide themselves with a powerful and effective source of protection from confusion. Becoming more critical evaluators, they protect themselves against the constant semantic bombardment of propaganda, lies, misinformations, persuasions, advertisements, put ons, and put downs. These and other semantic barrages, without highly critical attentiveness, are usually very difficult to defend against. They are often disguised as helpful advice, accurate reporting, the voice of moral authorities, expert pronouncements, scientific findings, eternal verities, untouchable policies, cultural icons, news, and so on. (This is not to say that any of the above is not at sometimes well intended and well meant.)

Two of the fundamental general-semantics ABMs are the principle of "non-allness" and the principle of "non-identity." (These principles, by the way, can be put to the test by anyone; no extraneural tools necessary.) The principle of non-allness states that "We cannot know, say, understand, experience, etc., all about anything." To do this we would have to at least know at what stage of a process something existed; and we would also have to know all its past, present, and future relationships and possible evolution; and probably most important of all, we would need to know ourselves, as knowers (i.e., what are we knowing, when we claim we know).

The principle of non-identity could stand on its own, but follows logically from the principle of non-allness. Simply put, this principle states that "No two things are identical the same in every respect." A logical relationship between these two principles can be stated as follows: "If we cannot know, experience, understand, etc., all of anything, then whatever we may think, know, believe, say, understand, etc., cannot be validly asserted to be identical with what is going on." From an empirical perspective, the principle of non-identity stands on its own: If we can notice that there are two anythings they would have to be in two different places, no matter how close. Therefore, they could not be identical.

From a general-semantics perspective, attitudes and behaviors that are generated by the allness attitude contribute a great deal to our misunderstandings, disagreements, conflicts, and violence, with others and within ourselves.

The allness attitude tends to build communication barriers, strain relationships, and generate conflicts and bad feelings, when one individual or group, by the way they talk to others, dismiss or ignore others' points of view, experiences, beliefs, and ways of thinking and talking. The allness attitude contributes to problems in human relationships when an individual or group asserts unqualified and unconditional totalities by not modifying their statements with references to time, place, context, frames of reference, standards, norms, premises, and so on.
We can get clues to the allness attitude when we encounter statements that include without qualifications, such terms as “all, always, everybody, every time, everywhere, you are always doing this, and you do this all the time.” Defending ourselves against the allness barrage could be relatively easy if statements always came in a form that included these terms. But this is not usually the case. Allness statements come in a variety of forms. I call statements that do not explicitly include “all, never, always,” “ASID” – allness statements in disguise. We need a great deal of critical attentiveness and critical evaluating, based on a standard of non-allness and non-identity, to protect ourselves from the implied allness in ASID.

Here are some examples of ASID: “The fact of the matter is .... The question is .... The problem is .... There is only one solution to this .... The correct thing to do is .... The right thing to do is .... That’s not art .... That’s not music .... That’s not funny ....”

One way to protect ourselves from the effects of unconditional allness is to substitute the word “some” (when appropriate) where we find “all” and “every.” When we find “always,” we could substitute “sometimes.” We can do this quietly to ourselves. In many situations, for peace sake, we don’t have to challenge the speaker or writer. It may be helpful to remember that often in challenging another, we unwittingly introduce our own brand of allness. We say “It’s not ‘that’ (their brand) at all... it’s ‘this’ (our brand).”

In the above examples of ASID, problems in communication and relationships tend to arise mainly on account of the following factors: One person or group is understood by another to be saying that they have access to all the facts; that all other considerations and questions are irrelevant, and even non-existent; that they know all that matters in solving the problem. The person or group on the receiving end of this ASID test, and who has their own brand of facts, questions, and solutions, will react in various ways, depending on their relative power status, level of self-esteem, and their critical evaluating skills. The reactions could span a range from humor to violence depending on the following feeling-evaluations (among others). They may feel cowed, put down, shut out, shut off, unimportant, resentful, hurt, incompetent, amused, grateful, angry. For better relationships, we could practice talking with each other in ways that do not create incompatible totalities. We could make an effort to allow our conversation to be felt as accommodating other points of view, other ways of seeing things.

“Should/n’t, ought/not, must/n’t, never,” are other examples of ASID which when used and interpreted unconditionally, tend to create communication and relationship problems. When I hear, read, or use statements with these words, I usually put in my qualifiers: “except, unless, if, for what reasons? who made those rules?”, etc.

Here are a few more examples of ASID. See if you can formulate the allness implied in these statements. “You/I are/am good for nothing. You/I are/am a lazy no good. You/I will never amount to anything. You/I are/am a complete failure.”

Can you remember hearing any of the following phrases in conversations, debates, meetings, interviews, political speeches? Can you formulate the allness implications? And would it make a
difference to you if you added to these statements, where appropriate, these modifiers: “to me, as I see it, to the best of my knowledge, as far as I know, in my opinion” and so on? Here are phrases requiring special attention:

“What is important ... It's not important ... The reality is ... Nothing has changed ... It's all the same ... What is really going on is ... The truth of the matter is ... There is no reason for this ... What is the true meaning of this? ... Is it because, or is it because? ... It must be either one or the other ... It must be either, or ... You are absolutely right ... This must be what is going on ... What does this all mean? ... There is no other explanation for this ... It is quite obvious ... Any intelligent person will agree that ... That has nothing to do with anything ... What this all means ... What is at issue here is ... There is no other way to see this ... And that's the end of the matter ... As a matter of fact ... The important thing is ... That's all there is to that ... There's nothing more to say ....”

Now if you want to hear “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth after all is said and done,” that’s not all there is to the matter. Developing a non-allness approach involves, among other factors, constant critical attentiveness to the ways we use and interpret words. And since words, whether in silent conversations with ourselves or conversing with others, play a major role in our lives, constant critical attentiveness does not come easily. One source of the difficulty revolves around our concerns related to the impressions we are making on others our self-image. We think we do not sound as authoritative, knowledgeable, expert, confident, or forceful when we add modifiers such as “to me, as far as I know, in my opinion, etc.,” to our claims and pronouncements. Remembering that “we cannot fool all the people all the time” may alleviate some of those concerns. In time “actions speak louder than words.”

Another source of difficulty has to do with “habit.” Attempting to interrupt ingrained habits of thinking and talking requires constant self-monitoring. Not easy. “Trust me.” Developing a non-allness orientation involves more than just using or avoiding certain words and phrases. Probably among the most important factors in developing (I didn’t say “achieving”) a non-allness orientation include the following. (i) A strong interest in uncovering some of the root causes of poor human relationships. (ii) A deep concern to find ways to create healthier, more satisfying relationships. Allowing that allness and non-allness do not reside in words but has to do with our attitudes, intentions, and interpretations, the above interests and concerns could help us to become more vigilant, more critically attentive to our own ways of talking, and to our interpretations and evaluations of what others “say.”

Allness attitudes express themselves in many different forms. Some of us act at times as if our age, title, skills, profession, or education gives us a monopoly on intelligence. Sometimes we treat others as if they have nothing worthwhile to contribute to a discussion. To be more specific, there are some supervisors who at times act as if employees under their supervision have little or no sense; there are teachers who sometimes act as if they were repositories of knowledge, and see their students as empty vessels; there are doctors who sometimes act as if the only thing their patients can do to assist in their own healing is to say “ah”; there are mechanics who sometimes
act as if you could not possibly have any idea as to what could be wrong with your car; there are politicians who sometimes profess to have all the answers to the society’s problems; and there are the religious leaders who preach that their system of belief is the one and only true path to righteousness and salvation. You may have heard these words: “You are not a... so what do you know about ....” You may find it a useful exercise to try and spot ASID the next time you are involved in a conflict. (Keep in mind that whether you are wrongish or rightish in your evaluation, it is your interpretation illness or non-allness does not reside in words.)

A non-allness orientation could benefit us much more than just improved communication, conflict management, and relationships. In a world of accelerating changes and increasing diversity of beliefs and interests, a non-allness approach can help us become more flexible. It can help us become more creative, (creative in the sense of recognizing that there are innumerable ways of thinking, talking about, experiencing, and doing things not just the traditional, the popular, the accepted ways). Becoming more creative (with a broader base of being, experiencing, knowing, and doing), can help us become more intelligent and effective problem solvers and decision makers. We will need “all” of the above and more, in meeting the challenges and demands that confront us each day when we are among family, friends, and co-workers. With critical attentiveness, we can avoid much of the corrosive effects of an allness attitude on our relationships.

I am not claiming that a non-allness orientation is “all that matters”; is “the one and only”; or is “the best solution” to our relationship problems. I am suggesting that “we could get along better with each other, if we stopped throwing so much ASID at each other.”

Milton Dawes lives in Montreal, where he combines lectures, music, and dance in the training workshops he offers in “Personal and Professional Development through General Semantics.”

A Calculus Approach to the Communication Process

Variables:

**Verbal Expressions**
- We tell stories
- describe things
- make assumptions
- give opinions
- criticize, generalize
- seek information
- give information
- disagree, explain
- agree, encourage
- give feedback
- make suggestions
- make comments
- make jokes
- ridicule, etc.

**Non-verbal Expressions**
- Body Language: gestures, pointing, visualizing
distance, touching, imagining
facial expressions, etc.
Tone of voice and volume
Dress, physical surroundings, etc.

**Obstacles**
- Inattention
- Role and power plays
- Nervousness, anxiety
- Stress, fatigue
- Resentments, prejudices
- Criticisms, contradictions
- Challenges, confrontations
- Refutations, etc.
- Protecting self-image
- Cultural differences
- Too many - and unfamiliar - words
- Jumping to conclusions, etc.

**Facilitators**
- Sensitivity to feedback
- Concern to understand
- Clear formulations
- Clarity of intentions & goals
- Mutual respect
- Friendly approach
- Openness
- Encouragement
- Patience
- Timing
- Empathetic listening, etc.

A Calculus Approach: A way to understand complex processes by studying the interactions of their simpler components.

Applying the calculus approach helps us to realize that:

- *We cannot not communicate.*
- *Everything we do ... and do not do ... communicates messages to others.*
- *A great deal of our communication ... is with ourselves.*

A calculus approach helps us to:
- send clearer messages to ourselves and to others ...
- become more alert to potentials for misinterpretations and misunderstandings ...
- recognize that what we understand is not necessarily what was meant ...
- improve and increase the accuracy of our interpretations ...
- create more satisfying and harmonious relationships in our personal and professional lives.

**By paying close attention and silently labelling our pronouncements, we can recognize when we are telling stories, jumping to conclusions, making assumptions, criticizing, seeking information, generalizing, and so on.**

**By recognizing when we are making assumptions, jumping to conclusions, criticizing, etc., we can greatly improve our communications with ourselves ... about our communications with others.**

**The more we communicate with ourselves about communications with others, the more opportunities we give ourselves for improving our communication skills.**

“Good” communications have to do with the closeness of fit between the message intended and the message received.

**Feedback is of paramount importance.**
A Principle of Non-Identity Applied to the Communication Process

The Word is not the Thing
Related feelings, concerns, expectations, interests, wishes, etc.
translated to intended message
represented by chosen symbols: words, pictures, etc.
transmitted through space-time
seen and/or interpreted responded to

The Map is not the Territory
THIS is not THIS is not THIS is not THIS is not THIS is not THIS is not THIS is not

Representative words, pictures, etc. may not appropriately or accurately convey message.
Receiver may not hear or read correctly what was said or written.
Receiver will give his-her interpretation to what was heard or read ... this may not be what was said or written.
Receiver will respond in terms of his-her interpretations and understandings.

At each level or stage of the process there are enormous opportunities for misinterpretations.

No amount of words, however well chosen, can accurately represent all that was intended by the sender.
Medium (telephone, letter, airspace, etc.) may result in distortions, deletions, etc. of the message.
Receiver will interpret and understand based on his-her values, beliefs, interests, experience, attitudes, etc.
Both sender and receiver may not realize that words do not have meanings.

It is the users of words that give meanings ... their meanings, to words and other symbols.
What symbols mean to sender is not what these “same” symbols mean to receiver.

Feedback is of paramount importance.

By paying close attention and silently labeling our pronouncements, we can recognize when we are telling stories, jumping to conclusions, making assumptions, criticizing, seeking information, generalizing, and so on.

By recognizing when we are making assumptions jumping to conclusions, criticizing, etc., we can greatly improve our communications with ourselves ... about our communications with others.

The more we communicate with ourselves about communications with others, the more opportunities we give ourselves for improving our communication skills.

“Good” communications have to do with the closeness of fit between the message intended and the message received.

Feedback is of paramount importance.
AN APPROACH TO EVERYDAY LIVING: A Note Regarding the Calculus

By Milton Dawes

This essay reflects some of my current high order speculating-abstractions. I suggest readers apply visualization and imagination; "rational," "intellectual," and "logical" analysis alone will not help much. It would also help to remember that the world does not present itself to us as "variables" and "functions." These represent "labels" we create for our own convenience -- semantic tools to help us communicate with ourselves and others, and understand ourselves-in-our-world. When we forget this, and confuse words with what they represent, instead of communication we get misunderstandings; and instead of understanding we get confusion. According to Korzybski: "As the organism works as-a-whole, for its optimum working, and, therefore, for sanity, we need a language, a method, which may be translated into a s.r. [semantic reaction] by which to translate the dynamic into the static, and vice versa; and such a language, such a method is produced and supplied by mathematicians." (Science and Sanity, fourth edition, p.288)

Could features of the calculus, differentiation of a function, and antidifferentiation, have anything to do with translation from dynamic to static and vice versa? I believe so. (What follows represents my generalizations of the method of the calculus.)

Using speed as an example: "Speed" as movement (dynamic) is translated to the static when we differentiate and get the representation ds/dt. ("Speed" (static label) a function, some sort of a ratio, relating change of position, and change of time -- in other words, distance traveled in time taken.) This represents one way our limited nervous systems manage changes and relationships, too fast, too complex, too enormous, for us to map directly. We scale things down to more manageable proportions. If I am running (dynamic), I have an experience I can relate to the term "speed." The term "speed" could be considered a crude macro-mapping and verbal representation, an abstraction of the activity I call "running." So we have muscles and feet, and hands, and breathing, and heart pumping blood etc., as lower order abstraction-differentiation, to running (higher order abstraction-integration), to speed, (still higher order). The ratio ds/dt represents a more precise mapping (micro-mapping) and a mathematical translation, a differentiation, a representation, a method, which can be applied generally to many different situations involving movement. So we have gone from lower order to higher order and back to lower order. And ds/dt (the formula) can be considered a higher order abstraction embodying lower order abstractions (change in position divided by change in time). Here is another example. Let's take the term "consciousness." Again we have a dynamic situation which many of us can recognize as related to that term. The term represents a macro-mapping, static verbal representation of an ongoing organismal process ("continuous function"). The activity called "consciousness" (human) can be considered as a system that both differentiates and antidifferentiates. (Antidifferentiation can be considered as the reverse of differentiation.) To put it in very simple terms, our consciousness scales things down and then does "creative reassemblies."

And let's now take "whatever is going on in and around us," as another dynamic situation, to which we give the static label WIGO. We listen, look, select, analyze, objectify (create objects from sense impressions), make distinctions, label, describe objects, make inferences, explain, etc. We could view this as "differentiating-consciousness." And we also classify, search for meanings, look for
patterns, generalize, understand, explain, have beliefs, create scientific laws, mathematical formulas, come to conclusions, have "feelings" about things, and so on. We could view this as "antidifferentiation" -- a what's-behind-the-scene kind of a thing. It is important to remind ourselves that depending on our level of abstracting, many of these activities can be classified as both differentiation and antidifferentiation. When I listen, for instance, I hear-select-abstract a particular sound. But this sound usually represents a complex of frequencies, and so my nervous system has in its differentiating, integrated all these varying frequencies into what I hear and call "sound.") We could now look at "consciousness of abstracting" as remembering that in our differentiating-abstractings (including projections), in everyday situations, as in mathematics, we have left out factors. In differentiating "speed" as the ratio of change in position and change in time, for instance, the clothes I wore, the kind of running shoes, how anxious I was to reach my destination, etc., is left out of the equation. So in relating this to WIGO, our consciousness differentiates and integrates (antidifferentiates). We ignore-select-abstract factors and so arrive at-create-abstract static representations. And the "density" (number of instances of consciousness of abstracting in a period of time) could represent a measure of the degree of our awareness and non-awareness as a function of the unreachable limit of "being aware of all that's going on." In other words we have a ratio involving what we experience, know, understand etc., and what we could experience, know, understand. (This could be one way to help us recognize the importance of adding "et cetera" to our beliefs, knowledge, understanding, etc.)

The power and the beauty of the calculus for me lies in this close set of relationships involving variables (values selected from a given range -- abstracting), functions, (relationship between variables) change, change of change, invariance; rate of change; maxima and minima (high points and low points), changing relationships, time, incremental differences, trends, self-reflexiveness (we (humans) create calculus, and using calculus helps us to understand ourselves); non-identity, non-allness, (the concept of approaching a limit necessitating approximation); mapping, consciousness, and consciousness of abstracting, etc. I propose that anyone looking at the vocabulary of the calculus cannot fail to recognize how easily these terms can be generalized and meaningfully applied to everyday situations. If we are not conscious of abstracting we identify. If we do not discriminate or differentiate, we identify. "We see what we see because we miss all the finer details." (Science and Sanity, p.376) "Sanity means adjustment, and without the best structural knowledge of each date concerning this world, such adjustment is impossible." (p.727) "As a structural fact, the world around us is not a 'plus' affair, and requires a functional representation." (p.603) The calculus as a tool works very well in helping us understand ourselves, our world, and ourselves-in-our-world.

The definition of the calculus that I have found very useful is this one:

The study of a continuous function by following its development through indefinitely small steps.

This relatively simple definition, when generalized and applied to everyday situations, can help us understand many very complex situations. It becomes a matter, as mentioned before, of breaking complex dynamic situations down to more static, smaller, more manageable proportions. To get a feel of this, I invite you to apply the definition to the following: learning to drive a car; or learning
to ski; or planning a party; avoiding a conflict; explaining something to someone; planning a vacation.

(If the definition above is not quite clear, try this. Find several different words for each of the following: study, continuous, function (happening or relationship), following, development, indefinitely small steps. Then re-arrange these substituted words to create your own definitions. I’ll supply a few examples for a start. It’s important that the reader supply other terms and actually do the task.

For study we substitute investigation, examination, watching. For continuous we substitute ongoing, flowing, uninterrupted. For function we substitute situation, process, activity.

For following we substitute studying, observing, noticing, monitoring. For development we substitute growth, unfolding, change, progress. For indefinitely small we substitute incremental, minute, tiny. In doing this, you may be delighted to discover that you have self-referentially applied the method of the calculus to improving your understanding of the definition of the calculus. One example of a “reassembled” definition might now look like this.

The mapping of an ongoing situation, by observing its unfolding, through tiny steps.

Another might resemble this:

Watching an uninterrupted activity by tracking its progress through very tiny changes.

There are at least 80 definitions you could assemble this way. I urge you to try it and create one that you find appealing and useful to you.

Now consider this: If the continuous function we study is our behavior with respect to time, one can easily get a feel that the calculus is more than a mathematical device. Since we live in a world of changing relationships, the calculus can also be used as a "psycho-logical tool" that we can apply to help us study factors related to personal development, improving communication, problem solving, conflict management, time management, stress management, and much more. In a conversation or a teaching situation for instance, we can use the calculus approach to help us recognize when someone has stopped listening, or lost interest, or isn’t following, or starting to get upset, and so on.

The method of the calculus can be applied to help us understand and improve almost anything we do. It’s mainly a matter of "paying very, very close attention," to what we are doing; how we are doing what we are doing; and what happens when we do whatever we happen to be doing. With practice in using a calculus approach, you may quickly discover for yourself a very close relationship between the method of the calculus and the important general-semantics formulation "consciousness of abstracting."

ABSTRACTS ON SCIENCE

by Milton Dawes

• we may perhaps say that science is a human activity developing an historically cumulative body of interrelated techniques, empirical knowledge, and theories related to the natural world...in this respect, science can be considered as the only human activity that is cumulative and progressive....

• the scientific method involves principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge, including recognition and formulation of problems, collection of data through observation and experiment, and the formulation and testing of hypothesis....

• if there is any primary rule of science, it is the acceptance of the obligation to acknowledge and describe ‘all’ of reality, ‘all’ that is the case, ‘all’ that exists. Before all else, science must be comprehensive and ‘all’-inclusive....It must accept within its jurisdiction, even that which it cannot understand or explain, that...which cannot be measured, predicted, controlled or ordered...

• the openness of science is toward the reorganization of our beliefs....and the extension of our experience....

• the criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability....

• it is the first, and in a way, the most important task of science, to enable us to predict future experience....so that we may direct our present activities accordingly....

• the scientific method relies upon rational arguments, based on up to date empirical knowledge, rather than emotional appeals, usually grounded in outdated cultural, religious, political, authoritarian....biases.....

• ‘all’ science becomes a search for the unknown structure of the empirical world on ‘all’ levels, and the matching of this unknown structure with the potentially known structure of languages...

• the object of ‘all’ science, whether natural science or psychology, is to coordinate our experiences, and to bring them into a logical system....

Science represents the highest structural abstractions that have been produced at each date. It is a supreme abstraction from ‘all’ the experiences of countless individuals and generations.

*This collection was compiled over several years from many sources. The last two abstracts were stated by Einstein and Korzybski.*
A SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
ABOUT FIELDS
by Milton Dawes (1991)

The term generally connotes associated and surrounding phenomena...

each body modifies the structure of the space which surrounds it, geometrically and/or energetically.

The description of the physical world has evolved profoundly through the ages, at times because of at other times being the cause of, sweeping changes in our philosophical, mathematical, and experimental knowledge. Greek geometry concerned itself essentially with properties of "objects as such," a triangle or a cube being studied, for example, without any thought of their spatial environment; only with Descartes' analytical geometry did objects become "portions of space" and the properties of space itself the main object of study.

FIELD THEORY STUDIES THE PHENOMENA OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD AS DUE TO INTERACTIONS WHICH PROPAGATE THROUGH SPACE ..............

The joint interplay of electric and magnetic forces... is what is called an electromagnetic field, and is considered as having its own objective existence in space apart from any electric charges or magnets with which it may be associated.

[Above selections from Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopedia Fifth Ed.]

In general-semantics terms generalizing the notion of fields, we could say that each body (each individual) modifies the 'space' which surrounds her/him, geometrically (we build structures, institutions, roads, tools, machines, etc.); energetically (we build dams, bombs, power stations, broadcasting systems, machines, appliances, etc.); and most importantly, symbolically (we create neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic environments; we speak, write, produce works of art; create institutions, societies, science, mathematics, religions, philosophical systems, political economic, moral and other systems).

Our fears, hopes, joys, expectations, aspirations, prejudices, determinations, concerns, interests, self-images, world views, etc., not only modify the structures of our own internal environments but through our attitudes and what we say and do, modify the structure of the environment for others. As time-binders we have responsibilities for the 'mind' fields we create for our 'selves' and others.
A UNIVERSE OF RHYTHMS

To paraphrase Korzybski: in a world of diversity and change, when we discover something that seems to remain relatively invariant, then we are unto something of great significance and importance to us in understanding ourselves-and-our-world. “Relative invariance under transformation” is a general-semantics generalization of the important scientific and mathematical principle “Invariance of principles and laws under transformation of frames of reference. I propose that “rhythms” like “structure” constitute such an invariance.

You could think of “relative invariance under transformation” as a fancy way of saying something “A” is structurally similar to, is like, some other thing “B.” And also another way of saying “although “A” has changed, broadly speaking, there are some features of “A” that have remained relatively unchanged.” We are “talking relative invariance” when we say “like father, like son.” Laws, rules, regulations, policies, mission statements, maps, etc., can all be considered examples of the relative invariance principle. (Times, location, personnel, etc., might have changed, while policies, rules, etc., might not be updated – sometimes detrimentally so.) Metaphors, analogies, models, explanations, theories, maps, etc., can also be considered examples of relative invariance.

In addition to the various ways we have been writing and ‘thinking’ about objects, and our perception of objects, we can also apply the relative invariance principle to increase our understanding of this process. To facilitate this approach, I invite you to imagine you are observing a very densely packed swarm of bees and imagine that you don’t know, and cannot see, that there is an invisible barrier (let’s say a star trek-like force field) that surrounds and moves with this swarm; creating a boundary which cannot be crossed by a bee. Now visualize what you might observe watching this swarm from a distance, far enough away so that you are unable to see individual bees.

Now imagine a very large number of densely packed interacting and interrelating subatomic particles, each moving at tremendous speeds in diverse directions. Also imagine some kind of force field accompanying this ‘swarm of particles.’ This force field prevents most of the particles from flying off in all directions as the bees would without their surrounding force field. (Now don’t be picky here. I know that a swarm of bees tend to stay together. So imagine an unruly swarm that ignores the rules of swarming.) In terms of “relative invariance” this eventful subatomic activity, this swarm of particles, can be likened to that swarm of bees. We could now consider an object as “a structure that remains and appears to us relatively unchanged through all the various changes of directions and movements of its constituent ‘parts-ticles.’ A structure that remains topologically relatively invariant through all the tremendous activities and energetic interactions of its constituents.” Now for a change of rhythm. (By the way, I invite you to see if you can sense other changes in rhythm while reading this story. Keep in ‘mind’ that “rhythm” is not only about sounds and music.)

“Relative invariance” is very much involved in the communication process. Communication works well when what I think-feel is well represented by what I say. And what I say, or intend, is well received, and represented, by a listener’s interpretations and meanings. The
principle is also useful in helping us to improve our general understanding of various, seemingly unrelated features, of our world. If for instance, we know that something "A" is like some other thing "B," then knowing something about "A" can help us to understand, expect, and even make predictions about "B." The principle of relative invariance under transformation constitutes a fundamental characteristic of scientific activities. Living and non-living systems exhibit the relative invariant cycle of coming into being, growing, and eventually declining or going out of being. We often, to our distress, ignore this relative invariant rhythm, when we expect "a good thing to last" or remain the 'same.'

Another area where the relative invariance principle can be useful has to do with our notion of "self." So let's suppose the 'object' we are examining is our "self." In terms of the principle, a "self" can be considered as "those aspects of a human organism that remain relatively unchanged through a diversity of changes and transformations of other aspects of the organism." Each one of us can determine for ourselves, what we have discovered in our own thinking-feeling-behavior-attitudes-beliefs-values-needs-fear-pleasures-and so on, that have remained relatively unchanged over the years, and places. (The hyphens serve to emphasize the interrelatedness of these various factors).

Speaking for 'my self,' what I have discovered as an invariant over the many years and different places, involves what I describe as a "persistent drive to understand two things: what this universe is about, and consciousness." With respect to this, and applying the relative invariant principle, I have arrived at a place where I evaluate "rhythms" as one of the most invariant characteristics of universe. (I am still working on consciousness.) You might recall Korzybski's "structure is the only content of knowledge." Well if we include the time factor, this statement can be translated to "rhythms (structure and structural changes) are the only content of knowledge." You only have to remember that "structures change over times and places."

"Rhythms" can be considered in terms of "a measure of structural transformation." And "structural transformation" can be considered in terms of how a system changes with respect to different times and places. Terms related to "measure of structural transformation," include frequency, vibration, pitch, cycle, wave, recurrence, periodicity, pulsation, variation, rate of change, patterns of change, fluctuations, speed, (change of position with respect to time), how often, ups and downs, going with the flow, to everything a season, comings and goings, among others.

Our personal and more easily observable rhythms involve our swing and sway, and various other movements when we walk, for instance. When we are abroad, criminal types recognize us by the way we walk, look around, and so on. Our rhythms are different from the rhythms of the 'natives.' We recognize friends, acquaintances, and others, from a distance, and in not so well lit places, by the relative invariance of their movement rhythms. The pitch of our voice, our intonation, our speaking speed, when we are being affectionate, or when we are excited, angry, distressed, nervous, and so on, illustrate variations in rhythms. We move around differently when we feel good, compared to how we move when we are not feeling so good. We listen,
A Universe of Rhythms

learn, understand, eat, sleep, do a variety of things, and so on, at our own pace. We recover from physiological and psycho-logical injuries, at our own pace. (Some of us may be very forgiving. And others may hold a grudge for a lifetime. Some groups hold a grudge for centuries.) Other rhythms involve our personal, domestic, social, work related, and other habits and activities. Age differences, social standing, moods, and so on, find expression in our rhythms. In our many relationships, personal, intimate, social, cultural, political, international, etc., an invariant source of a variety of problems, conflicts, and disagreeableness, can be attributed to a “clash of rhythms.”

In the workplace for instance, more and more employers are beginning to recognize that some individuals do not shift easily from night shift to day shift. In international politics, many politicians, not having a knowledge of, or caring about differences in rhythms, often create social-cultural-economic-and other problems that persist for many years. This usually occurs when certain practices or policies are imposed on another, without alloting sufficient time for a change in that culture’s rhythms.

On the road, many accidents occur when a driver makes a sudden stop, or lane change, or change in speed. In general, sudden changes in rhythms, that do not allow sufficient adjustment time for others often create problems. In medicine, some doctors are beginning to recognize that some medication and treatment and operations are more effective at certain times of the day. The rhythms of adults are usually very different from the rhythms of little children. But the rhythms of grandparents often seem much more adaptable to the rhythms of little children even more than the mothers and fathers. ‘Nations’ exhibit rhythms, observable in their level of economic, population, international stature, military, etc., growth and decline. We could define a culture in terms of relative invariant behaviors of a ‘people’ in terms of beliefs, speech patterns, music, dance, and so on. There are cameras that produce sharp pictures, despite shaky hands. Although I know little about the technology involved, I would take a bet that the invariance principle has been applied. The recording industry would not exist without some application of the relative invariance principle.

In our everyday living and interactions, our communication with others, in our efforts toward self-development and self-improvement, etc., how often we are conscious of our abstractions (remembering that we have not included all in our experience, interpretations, beliefs, verbalizing, etc.) can make a very big difference.

As human individuals, we literally disturb each others rhythms. This cannot be helped. If we live in the ‘same’ world, and interact with each other, we will ‘disturb’ each other’s rhythms to lesser and greater degrees. And sometimes, we react quite strongly to such disturbances.

In terms of “rhythms,” a characteristic of a ‘good’ houseguest is, the person who does not move things around, leave things lying around, do things etc., which requires a host to put things back, pick up things, undo things, and so on. In other words, a characteristic of a ‘good’ houseguest is, “a person who is sensitive to, and does not unduly disturb the rhythms of a host.”
A Universe of Rhythms

Sometimes, we even disturb our own rhythms when we push ourselves too fast, and too much. And when we take on more than our psycho-physiological systems can adapt to in a given time period. When you are waiting impatiently for someone, or for something to happen, you can be sure you are experiencing a difference in rhythms. And when things don’t go the way we expect them to, or want them to, look for a difference in rhythms as a possible source of the problem. We often create much problems for ourselves as individuals and as a species, when we attempt to hurry the universe, or “push the river” – and sometimes when we dam it. But through awareness of, and a sensitivity to rhythms, we can sometimes create a harmony of rhythms – at least for a while. For, would you believe it, rhythms have rhythms. In other words “rhythms” like anything else also change.

Here is another way to get a ‘feel’ of rhythms. Imagine a tree, or better yet, look at one: a tree with lots of branches and leaves. ‘Observe’ the variety of movements and rhythms. If there is a light breeze, the leaves might be doing a fluttering dance like the leaves of an aspen. This will be different from the rhythms of the smaller branches; which will be different from the rhythms of the bigger branches. If it is a very big tree, the trunk may not show much movement, or any movement – but it also has its complex of rhythms. Can you specify a rhythm for the trunk? And another rhythm of the leaves? And can you ‘think’ of any structure that cannot be associated with a complex of rhythms?

In other words, I am proposing that “everything, as far as we know, can be thought of in terms of rhythms.” And that ‘thinking’ in terms of rhythms is not just a “philosophical exercise,” but also has practical benefits. ‘Thinking’ in terms of rhythms can be very helpful in improving our personal and other relationships. Including “rhythms” as one of our management tools can help us better avoid and manage stress; become more patient with ourselves, and develop more patience, tolerance, and understanding in interacting with others. In solving problems, and making decisions, including ‘rhythms” as a variable could be an important move. For instance in many everyday situations, we often create our own problems by not asking ourselves such questions as “how often has this happened? Is this something that is likely to happen again? Is there a major difference in rhythms involved?” And so on. A sensitivity to “rhythms” can improve our judgment, help us to anticipate and manage change, recognize trends, and much much more. And now for another change in rhythm.

You may recall the wise old folk saying “You can take a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” Or this one: “Don’t cross the bridge, ’til you come to it.” This was about “rhythms.” Don’t you ‘think’?

Milton Dawes/96