In 1980, David D. Burns' popular self-help book Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy appeared. Burns, an M.D., wanted to make cognitive therapy "user friendly" for the lay person. I believe that he has accomplished his objective. In addition, I regard Feeling Good as one of the most valuable books I have ever read. I have purchased and given away more than a dozen copies of this book to friends and relatives, including my son, who used it successfully to bring himself back from the brink of suicidal depression.

Interestingly, both cognitive therapy and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy share significant formulative underpinnings with the insights presented in Korzybski's non-Aristotelian revision. This leads one to suspect that Kor-

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zybski's methodology probably abounds in procedures congruent with cognitive therapy. Dr. Burns states that, "The first principle of cognitive therapy is that all your moods are created by your cognitions or thoughts. A cognition refers to the way you look at things — what you say about something or someone to yourself." (Burns, 1980, p.11) In general semantics terms, we cannot elementalistically separate moods, "thoughts," and perceptions, for they become interconnected in one continuous evaluational process, which also includes "feeling," "thinking," responding, reinforcing, etc., within a physico-chemical medium — us.

Cognitive therapists, including David Burns, have concluded that "unsane" behavior and much "mental illness" stems from misevaluational patterns which Burns calls "cognitive distortions," or twisted "thoughts." Burns insisted that "emotional turmoil" (misevaluations) nearly always contain gross distortions of some perceptions, etc. After years of research at the University of Pennsylvania, working closely with Aaron Beck, Burns has carefully distilled "Ten cognitive distortions that form the basis of all your depressions." (Burns, 1980, p.31) When I first examined this list back in 1981, I felt delighted that these cognitive distortions and their associated antidotes showed much affinity to the misevaluational patterns frequently noted in the general semantics literature, including the problem of two-valued orientations, confusion concerning observation and inference, etc., and in general a pervasive failure to apply the Korzybskian exten- sional devices (see Note 1) and the post-Korzybskian device of E-Prime (see Note 2).

In this article I will summarize Burns' descriptions of cognitive distortions and his remedies, connecting them to patterns of misevaluations and the appropriate extensional devices.

1. The first cognitive distortion treated by Burns consists of what he calls All-or-Nothing Thinking. He claims that such "dichotomous thinking" forces the formulator to look at
situations, etc., in absolute black or white categories. In the parlance of Korzybskian methodology, we have referred to this misevaluational pattern as reflecting a two-valued orientation, often called either-or evaluating. For example, if I believe that everyone must like me, or else “I’m a total failure,” I exhibit such a two-valued orientation. But the world does not conveniently break into neat dichotomies of failure/success, bad/good, stupid/smart, etc. No one receives approbation and admiration from everybody. As a remedy we can apply the extensional device called the index, which can encourage one to “think” in terms of degrees, rather than either-or. Kenneth Keyes has referred to this corrective as “up to a point.” It also allows a multi-valued rather than a sterile two-valued orientation. S.I. Hayakawa suggested that we metaphorically use the steering wheel rather than the paddle to guide our evaluations.

2. Burns referred to the second distortion as Overgeneralization, or the practice of viewing “a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat” (Burns, 1980, p.40). Students of general semantics have referred to this misevaluational pattern as allness or an allness orientation, also known as frozen evaluation, failure to date, indiscrimination, or failure to index. Burns illustrated this pernicious misevaluation with the motorist who, upon seeing a drop of bird dung on his windshield, exclaims, “The birds always crap on my window,” even though it had happened only a few times. The motorist, attempting to turn left into oncoming traffic, complaining, “This traffic will never end,” and the athlete who laments, “This tendonitis will never stop,” also demonstrate the allness misevaluation or the overgeneralization cognitive distortion.

3. Burns called the third cognitive distortion Mental Filter, or Selective Abstraction. Actually, many cognitive distortions, but especially the Mental Filter and Disqualifying the Positive (discussed below) involve abstraction and projection errors.
In the Mental Filter error, the evaluator dwells on the negative and overlooks the positive aspects of a situation. We observe this behavior in the instructor who receives 22 positive evaluations from his students, and three negative evaluations, but fixates only on the negative ones. Figure 1, using a part of the Structural Differential, illustrates how such a filter distorts perceptions. Korzybski invited our attention to the etc., to remind us that when we abstract certain characteristics, we “form a structure” on the object level. Incidentally, J.S. Bois refers to the process level, sometimes called the event level on the Structural Differential, as W.I.G.O. (what is going on). (Bois, 1996, p.100f)

4. Burns illustrated his fourth cognitive distortion, Reverse Alchemy or Disqualifying the Positive, with the behavior of one who insists that his or her positive qualities do not count. The young seminary intern who feels the obligatory humility to warn his congregation that “God made Balaam’s ass speak too” before beginning his homily reflects this pernicious evaluational pattern. Students of general semantics might
well regard Disqualifying the Positive as the flip side of "Selective Abstraction" or as the process of "Saturation Projection," or neuro-semantic "Star Wars." We could illustrate this process as shown in Figure 2, where the nervous system systematically deflects and destroys positive characteristics that would otherwise have entered the Object of Perception. Korzybski would have us employ both consciousness of abstraction and consciousness of projection to neutralize the damaging effects of Selective Abstraction and Reverse Alchemy.

5. Burns' fifth set of cognitive distortions involve not only projection errors, but also the inference-observation confusion and failure to date. In the Mind-Reading cognitive distortion, Burns suggested that, "You assume other people are reacting negatively to you when there's no definite proof" (Burns, 1980, p.40). William Haney would refer to such behavior as reacting to a fact as though it provided the whole of a situation, forgetting to gather more data to substantiate an inferential hypothesis (Haney, 1960, p.17ff). The misevaluation pattern that, in general semantics, we might call "lack of consciousness of projection" also comes into play. As the Yiddish
proverb teaches us, "Der emess iz in di oigen, der ligen iz hinter di oigen." (The truth resides in the eyes [perception], and the lie resides behind the eyes [in the structuring apparatus or the cerebral cortex].)

6. Burns refers to a twin distortion of *Mind Reading* as *Fortune Telling*, an assumption that things will turn out badly from now on. In Sanford Berman’s cassette lecture on “The Importance of Change,” he suggests using general semantics techniques and he encourages us to eliminate such false-to-fact assumptions as (a) Things are static and non-changing; (b) Things happen for all time; and (c) That’s all that happens.

Berman refers to a dangerous misevaluational pattern called *unlocated hatred* or *undated hatred*. He suggests that we tend not to evaluate ourselves or another person “in time” or “at a date.” For example, a mistake made years ago still elicits the same negative feelings as when it happened. Consequently, the *where index* and the *when index* of Kenneth Keyes and the *dating device* of Korzybski would help us to eliminate the *Fortune Telling* error.

7. The *Magnification* or *Minimization* cognitive distortion error seems to represent an important variety of “mental filter” or “selective abstraction” error. It also relates to the problem of *Allness* discussed above. Burns uses the *binoculars analogy*, suggesting that, “You’re looking at your faults through the end of the binoculars that makes them appear gigantic and grotesque.” (Burns, 1980, p.36). In a similar way, matters which should receive our immediate attention, such as overdue bills or phone calls to return, may become trivialized by looking at them through the wrong end of the binoculars. We may again employ “consciousness of projection” to counteract the “binocular trick” cognitive distortion.

8. Burns called the eighth cognitive distortion *Emotional Reasoning*, or “reasoning from how we feel.” Burns sug-
We erroneously assume that much procrastination stems from this cognitive distortion because, "If I don’t feel like doing something, I just won’t do it." In this major projection error, we confuse orders of abstraction. We erroneously assume that what we perceive on the object level of perception identically equals the process level (W.I.G.O.). See Figure 3.

We can also see elementalism working in this distortion, in that the one who twists the idea or distorts the cognition fails to realize that the evaluation consists of "feeling," "thinking," perceiving, responding, etc. "Feeling" represents only one portion of the whole process of evaluating. "Emotional reasoning" occurs when we elementalistically separate perceiving from symbolizing, from "thinking," from "feeling," responding, etc.

9. Burns gives us as his ninth cognitive distortion the Should/Shouldn’t Statements, or the process of criticizing ourselves or other people with "should," "ought," or "must" statements. Dr. Albert Ellis (1994) has labeled this self-defeating, self-abusing behavior as Musturbation. Actually, Wendell Johnson (1946) anticipated certain aspects of this
behavior in his discussion of the *I.F.D. Disease*, that dangerous spiral leading from Idealization (vaguely defined goals) to Frustration by the happenings of life to ultimately Despair or Demoralization (Johnson, 1946, p.14). Korzybski warned us repeatedly of the role played by undefined terms and the expectations that can result from them. "Marriage," he suggested, could become a kind of agreement by definition in which each party has a vague, undefined notion of "husband," "wife," "affection," etc.

Both Korzybski and Irving J. Lee have given conceptual formulas to counteract unrealistic expectations and undefined terms. Korzybski spoke in his seminars about "Minimum Expectations" as the key to happiness. Along similar lines, Lee suggested that we keep our expectations low, but our motivation for working to achieve them high.

\[
\text{Happiness} = \frac{M}{H} = \frac{\text{Motivation}}{\text{Expectations}}
\]

10. Burns' tenth cognitive distortion, well known to the students of general semantics, consists of *Labeling*, in which a hapless individual identifies with one of his or her shortcomings. Instead of saying, "I made a mistake," he or she may say, "I'm a failure," "I'm a jerk" or "I'm a loser," etc. The individual mistakenly confuses one of his behaviors with himself. Dr. Sanford Berman refers to this misevaluation pattern as *Vertical Identification* or the *Is of Identity*, in which an occasional characteristic becomes magnified globally to encompass the entire person. Consequently, "Jim is a teacher," or "Jim is a Jew," or "Jim is a stutterer" become coterminous entities. We could just as easily apply the labels "breather," "eater," "yawner," "nose picker," etc., as well as "thief" "procrastinator," or "slob."

My friend D. David Bourland, Jr., has supplied the best antidote I know for the pernicious misevaluation of *Labeling* or
**Vertical Identification** — namely, the post-Korzybskian extensional device known as *E-Prime* (see Note 2). This procedure removes all forms of the verb "to be" and so, instead of saying "I'm a failure," I revise my evaluation to "I received a 69 on Professor Schmedley's physics test." Instead of saying or believing "I'm a total social zero," I revise my evaluation to the distressing (but more accurate) "I wore white socks to the formal dinner at the Country Club."

11. Finally, Burns lists *Personalization* and *Blame* as a distortion process in which "you blame yourself for something that did not prove entirely your fault, or you blame others, overlooking ways in which your own attitudes and behaviors contributed to the problem." (Burns, 1980, p.40) In addition to the "lack of projection" misevaluation discussed previously, calling for the "to me" corrective of Kenneth Keyes, this misevaluation pattern assumes a single cause, when most processes involve multi-causality. Burns rightly differentiates between influence and control.

I would personally evaluate David Burns' *Feeling Good* as one of the most significant books to come out of the last third of the Twentieth Century. I feel that cognitive therapy shares complementary foundational formulations with general semantics, as does Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, and when coupled with the extensional devices, it can perhaps become even more effective.
NOTES

1. In his introduction to the Second Edition of Science and Sanity, Korzybski listed the following as his extensional devices: Indexes, Dates, Etc., Quotes, and Hyphens. He subsequently added Chain Indexes. (Korzybski, p.lx of the Fifth Edition, 1994).


3. I wish to express my appreciation to D. David Bourland, Jr., for editorial assistance.

REFERENCES


