CONFERENCE PAPERS:
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The following papers were presented at the Twelfth International Conference, “Confronting the Challenges of Conflicting World Views,” October 31 to November 2, 2003, in Las Vegas, Nevada, sponsored by the Institute of General Semantics, the International Society for General Semantics, and the New York Society for General Semantics.

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THE CONUNDRUM OF KNOWING WHAT I DIDN’T KNOW (The Relevance of General Semantics to a Student)

KAREN VAN HOOF

To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great step toward knowledge.
—Disraeli

Or, “I thought I was a better than average communicator until I became conscious that I am ignorant.” My only consolation is that Disraeli considers my newfound awareness a “great step.” As a student at Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I have found the concepts and frameworks in my first general semantics course fascinating, and I have come to recognize the need for improvement in my communication skills.

For the course, I was given an assignment to write about the relevance of general semantics to me. I needed to find and then incorporate articles from the journal, ETC, that could help me develop and focus my ideas. As I read articles by Paul Johnston and Martin Levinson, it became apparent my communication skills were not as refined as I had thought. The realization was humbling, and I felt disappointed as I reflected on my past communication experiences.

Other than when I am sleeping, I cannot imagine a situation in my life where general semantics doesn’t have relevance (unless I talk in my sleep). I believe that understanding and implementing the models and principles of general semantics will help me to become a better student and has the potential to enrich my personal and professional relationships as well.

I suppose I was originally drawn to the professional communication major at Alverno College because I thought I was already a good communicator; but just a little knowledge of general semantics creates questions—as it should. First of all, what is good and whose definition should I use? What criteria will I apply and how and when will I know if I’m good? Perhaps, unconsciously at
the start, but consciously now, my objective is to become a better communicator by using my new linguistic tools.

Awareness creates its own tension. Now that I have some insight into general semantics principles, there is no turning back for me. I am not a person who easily disregards newly acquired, pertinent information, especially when the concepts and frameworks seem so apparent. I could try to ignore or minimize what I know now, but not without feeling guilty.

In particular, I can use general semantics to reduce the isolation I sometimes feel as well as the alienation of others. In the Fall 2001 issue of *ETC*, Martin Levinson wrote an article, “A General Semantics Approach to Reducing Student Alienation.” From December 1978 to April 1979, Levinson did a study of New York City junior high school students who were disruptive, verbally abusive, doing poor academically and experimenting with drugs (pp.259-273). The purpose of the study was to determine whether practicing general semantics by the students would have an effect in reducing their alienation and behavioral problems. Some of the philosophies and problem-solving methods the students studied and practiced were ‘delayed reactions,’ distinguishing facts from inferences, the dangers of negative self-inferences, and the WIS (“what I say”) is not equal to WIGO (“what is going on”) formula.

The result of the study was that using general semantics principles did seem to reduce the problem of student alienation. If practicing general semantics had a positive effect on rebellious, New York City junior high school students, I would imagine that the effects would be equal to or greater for a mostly non-disruptive, drug-free, respectful college student such as me.

From a theoretical perspective, I believe using the ‘delayed reaction’ technique would facilitate my listening skills, which could lead to making more effective evaluations and decrease snap judgments. I use the term theoretical perspective because while I have been thinking about delaying my reactions, I have not fully integrated this general semantics technique—yet.

To make effective evaluations and decisions, general semantics supports the use of ‘delayed reactions.’ This technique, which involves the human ability to consciously engage one’s higher brain functions and delay reacting in order to evaluate appropriately a situation before one acts, tends to produce much better results than reacting quickly or impulsively in most situations (Levinson, 2001).

Levinson writes about the benefits in “most situations.” I fully agree that the payback would not be limited to my interactions in an academic setting. As students at Alverno College, our communication does not have scholastic bound-
aries. In our team projects, small group discussions and extracurricular activities, the advantages of utilizing general semantics extends to our professional, social, and personal relationships. When I become experienced at delaying my reactions, I believe my effectiveness as a student group leader and a participant in the classroom will be greatly enhanced.

To find the needle of meaning in the haystacks of nonsense that the other fellow is talking is to learn something, even from the apparently prejudiced and uninformed. And if the other fellow is equally patient about looking for the needle of meaning in our haystacks of nonsense, he may learn something from us. Ultimately, all civilized life depends upon the willingness on the part of all of us to learn as well as to teach. To delay one’s reactions and to be able to say, “Tell me more,” and then to listen before reacting... (Hayakawa, 1991, pp.146-147).

Last semester I expressed to Professor of Philosophy, Donna Engelmann, my frustration with some of the “ridiculous” statements and observations made in class by other students. My question was, “Why would she say that?” Dr. Engelmann recommended another way of framing the question as, “Why would she say that?” The first question is judgmental and assumes I know all there is to know about “that.” In the second example, emphasizing “why” shows that I am more open and looking for that “needle of meaning in the haystack.”

By delaying my reactions before I speak, as well as withholding judgment when I listen, I might be viewed as less intimidating and, therefore, more open-minded and approachable. I would probably feel less isolated and more in control. By delaying my reaction when I listen, I manage the impulse to immediately focus on my response, and instead I concentrate more on understanding the speaker’s words. This could also extend to controlling my unspoken communication, i.e., body language. As my mother often said, “Wipe that look off your face,” and my response would be, “What? I didn’t say anything.”

The premature reaction, verbal or nonverbal, conveys an expectation and pre-judgment based on my prior experiences and indicates I think I know all there is to know. After studying general semantics, I know that there is always more that can be learned or added (or in GS terms, the extensional device of ‘etc.’).

Expectations can act as pre-judgments of unfolding situations or events. Such prejudice hinders you from an appropriately responsive evaluation of the specific event in the living present...overly high expectations may lead to harmful shocks to the nervous system, what you would call disappointments (Johnston, 2001).
Expectations may lead to disappointment in more than one way. I may be disappointed when my expectation is not realized, or conversely it can be equally disappointing when an expectation is met. No matter, either way, an expectation usually originates with an inference, as defined by Hayakawa (1991) as, “a statement about the unknown based on the known” (p.24). Inferences are neither good nor bad (Johnson, 2003), but the conclusions drawn from them can lead to inaccurate evaluations.

...the common characteristic of inferences is that they are statements about matters that are not directly known, made on the basis of what has been observed. Generally speaking, the quality of inference is directly related to the quality of the report or observations from which it stems and to the abilities of the one making the inference (Hayakawa, 1991, p.25).

The relevance of this quotation to me is that I need to consider the accuracy of my sources and maintain a healthy level of skepticism in my efforts to make more accurate, meaningful evaluations. I also need to reflect on my own inference-making abilities and appreciate that I can be the receiver of information as well as a sender. My pursuit of precise observations and appropriate responses will be never ending. I do know that the more I know, the more I realize how much I don’t know. From that observation, I will infer that I am taking a step toward knowledge.

I can offer a personal example of the non-application of general semantics. This embarrassing disclosure includes slant, bias, inaccurate maps, snap judgments, etc. At the time of this confrontation, I didn’t know about the extensional device, etc. If I had taken general semantics a semester earlier, I could have saved myself a lot of grief (hopefully).

A little over a year ago, I started attending the Thursday, lunchtime roundtable discussions at Alverno College. At that time, the controversial topic was the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Thinking that I knew a lot and eager to participate, I voiced my opinions on the horrific actions of the suicide bombers. I also had the viewpoint, historically speaking, that when a country “wins” a war against another, they shouldn’t be expected at some future time to give the land back to them. After all, they won. With very little research or information, I definitely aligned myself with Israel.

At the discussions was a group of loud, emotional Palestinian students, one of whom was in my science class. After class one day, I asked Sadiqa, “Why are you so upset by what is going on in Israel and don’t seem concerned about the murders of Muslims in India?” At that time, huge numbers of Muslims were
being slaughtered by Hindus in India. She walked away from me saying, “You
don’t know what you’re talking about. The situations aren’t anywhere at all the
same. The situation in India is about religion. Our issue is about land being
taken away and the suffering of our people under the occupation of the Israelis.
I’m not even going to talk to you about this.”

A short time later, Sadiqa decided she did want to talk to me. Our discus-
sion entailed her screaming at me in the cafeteria and my yelling back while a
number of her friends stood by her and chimed in. Eventually, I was reduced to
tears and couldn’t understand why we were all so upset.

“Why does one person tell me one thing is fact, or truth or right, and an-
other tell me exactly the opposite?” This is one of the questions Paul Johnston
asks in his article, “Escape from a Frozen Universe: Discovering General Se-
mantics” (1989). His article intrigued me because I have struggled with similar
issues regarding truth and knowledge. He writes, “Lacking reliable informa-
tion, how can one negotiate a complex society without making mistakes?” That
was my Oprah “a-ha” moment.

I have reflected on the aforementioned situation before, but not with the
understanding and clarity general semantics provides. My first mistake was to
accept everything I read in the newspapers or saw on television as truth. My
second blunder was to think I had acquired all the information that was avail-
able about either side of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I was responding inten-
sionally when I presumed that I knew all I needed to know and accepted some
aspects of the United States’ televised and print versions of truth as fact. “If
objective truth does not exist, we view the world subjectively. We negotiate the
truth. The most powerful negotiator wins,” writes Johnston (1989). Or as I think
of it, the most powerful truth wins whether it’s true or not.

Knowing what I know now, I would have tried to keep my mind open by
thinking, “There must be more information about this, and I need to have more
knowledge about both sides.” Or I could have reframed my smug question to
Sadiqa and asked if there were connections between the two groups of Mus-
lims. Understanding some of the concepts of general semantics and knowing
more (but not all) about the conflict, I can grasp why Sadiqa had such an emo-
tional reaction.

Johnston (1989) speaks of his search for truth and knowledge when he
writes, “In my search for definitions, I had written news stories, plays, humor,
theses, articles, poetry, short stories, novels. I had belonged to an institution
that gave its own slant to the truth and called it news.” It had never occurred to
me that the media presented anything other than the unbiased, unembellished
truth (Yes, I was that naive.). If I had been aware of extensional principles such
as non-allness and non-identification, I might have researched additional sources before making uninformed judgments.

If I had been using general semantics, I would have thought about my abstracting process. Before I had more information about my Palestinian-American classmates, I had originally labeled them in my head as Puerto Rican. I had “figured out” they were probably not Mexican Americans or Native Americans, but since I didn’t know what their ethnic background was, the obvious conclusion to me was Puerto Rican. They were definitely not Caucasian—their skin was too dark and their hair was black, and they sometimes spoke a rapid, clipped foreign language. And that was all the information I needed to abstract their ethnicity. I was, as Johnston (1989) would say, abstracting “what we think we know.” It gets worse.

When I became aware of their Palestinian origins, I clustered them together in my mind with those “crazy people who blow themselves up and don’t care who they kill including little children.” After all, all Palestinians are alike, right? In the roundtable discussions, they explained that most of their countrymen were equally appalled by these murderous acts as everyone else. While they in no way condoned the suicide bombers, they tried to help us comprehend the desperation and misery of someone who is willing to blow herself to bits because she doesn’t know what else to do. By putting all Palestinians into one group of maniacal terrorists, I certainly wasn’t using the extensional device of indexing. If I had given more thought to person1 not being the same as person2, my communication would have been much more sane, as Korzybski would say.

I was also operating under an Aristotelian system of logic that meant there were only good guys and bad guys. Johnston (1989) writes about his own struggle with this. “...I had learned an Aristotelian system of reasoning with which I perceived the world in terms of opposites: a thing was, or it was not: I thought in terms of black-white, beautiful-ugly, good-bad, dead-alive and so on.” Using an Aristotelian approach, I had to be either pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli. Johnston refers to this “on-off logic” as allowing no middle ground. Sadiqa and I were both guilty of not seeing the situation as having degrees of reality. Being on opposite sides of the truth was an obstacle to our having meaningful dialogue.

It has always been confusing to me that intelligent people could have such dissimilar ‘realities.’ Johnston resolved this for me in “Escape from a Frozen Universe” when he wrote, “Korzybski’s model of abstracting explained to me that people ‘know’ different realities as they abstract different pieces of a vast dynamic universe, and it explained why people of equal intelligence, education and ability hold such different beliefs” (1989).

I have always liked to think of myself as a non-judgmental person, but general semantics taught me a lot that helps make me aware of some judgmen-
tal tendencies. After I stopped putting facts last, I learned I could explore last year’s situation with an improved, saner framework. Sadiqa explained to me that many Palestinians, as do many Arabs, have a tendency to be loud and emotional in their exchange of ideas. They think nothing of it when they scream at each other, so this dimension of our disagreement was not a way of personally attacking me.

As Sadiqa and I got to know each other better, both of us progressed to lower rungs on the ladder of abstraction. She realized I wasn’t a militant, anti-Palestinian, but rather I may have been misguided. She took it upon herself to provide me with more information, and I was able to acknowledge that not all Palestinians think alike about resolving conflict.

Over a period of time, I began to understand her ‘reality’ and many of my abstractions shifted. Things probably would have unfolded differently if we had both known and applied general semantics. However, when we began to approach each other more extensionally, by not making inaccurate assumptions and appreciating that we would never know everything about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or each other, we gained an appreciation for our diversity and developed a mutually respectful friendship.

You can’t write about general semantics without the inclusion of “the map does not equal the territory” and “the word (symbol) is not the thing.” The application here is that the suicide bombers are not Sadiqa. Also, Sadiqa and I, at the time of the confrontation, were not the same as we were even a few minutes later when we hugged; nor were we the same less than a year later when she invited me to become an honorary member of the Muslim Student Association.

Epilogue

A couple of weeks ago, there was an interfaith prayer service for the faculty, students and staff of Alverno College. It consisted of music, reflections and readings about the world post-911 and the struggle for peace, unity and understanding. At one point, attendees were invited to express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences. A student named Eren, who is from Turkey and a Muslim, was the first person to speak. She wanted to thank the Alverno community for making her feel safe and accepted when many Muslims had been ostracized and attacked after 9-11. Next, the student I wrote about in my paper, Sadiqa, asked for the microphone. She spoke about our relationship and how it had started off with misunderstanding, frustration, and anger. She went on to say what a valuable, cherished friend I had become and announced that I
had won an award for best paper by the Institute of General Semantics based on our experiences.

REFERENCES


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**ON TIME-BINDING AS AN INSTRUMENT OF PEACE**

*(excerpt)*

**BY NANCY BIALEK**

Near the end of the movie *The World According to Garp*, based on John Irving’s novel, wrestling coach and author Garp and his wife sit in his car, parked in his driveway, watching his children playing through warmly illuminated windows. Garp talks about his favorite pastime—thinking about how he has come to this point in his life:

“It’s really nice, you know, to look back and see the arc of your life. And it’s all connected—how you got from there to here—see the line, you know? It really has been an adventure.

General Semanticists might say that Garp appears to be engaging in *intrapersonal* time-binding. He looks back through the complexity of memory,
beliefs, knowledge, symbols and his interpretation of his experiences, and, through the process of abstracting, perhaps finds some meaning to his existence. If Garp were conscious of the extensional device of dating, he might have seen himself at ‘time$_1$,’ ‘time$_2$,’ ‘time$_3$,’ etc., finally arriving at this particular moment in, let’s say, ‘time$_{36}$’.

Alfred Korzybski, in his lecture *Time-Binding and Human Potentialities*, discusses time-binding as the essential quality that uniquely defines us as human beings:

…that we can transmit the achievements of a fellow or the achievements of a generation to the next fellow or the next generation. I call that time-binding. Plants and animals don’t do it.

Milton Dawes, in his article “On Time-Binding,” points to the potential implications of time-binding:

This transmission of representational structures from an individual to him/herself, to others and across generations provides us with tremendous opportunities to learn from ourselves and others.

Whether we are studying *intrapersonal* time-binding (experienced by the individual) or *interpersonal* time-binding (experienced with and by others), Korzybski employs a mathematical equation, $PRt$, as a structure to describe time-binding in human culture. In this equation, $P$ stands for progress; $R$ stands for the ratio between the advance of that generation and the one before (or, in the case of the individual, perhaps we could say the ratio between the advance of that individual compared to a particular, earlier point in his/her life); and $t$ is the variable exponent which stands for the ‘time’ over which this process is going on. Korzybski points to the importance of $PRt$ as an *exponential* (or chain reaction), *not an additive*, equation: “We are dealing with exponential function which means endless growth, of whatever kind.”

The $PRt$ equation is one way to illustrate how we learn from those who have preceded us, and to use a mathematical structure to visualize how we learn from our own experiences. Garp does not appear to be looking at his life as a *straight* line connecting a beginning to his inevitable end. He sees his life as the exquisite mathematical structure of an arc.

To me, the idea of time-binding as an arc is extraordinarily resonant. A “time-binding arc” is a recurring theme (although not specifically articulated as such) in my studies at Alverno College. I would propose that we consider the idea of time within the structure of an arc. To do so would incorporate the idea
that human beings not only have the ability to evaluate their actions and experiences individually and collectively—an arc also illustrates the idea that human beings have the potential to change course through time-binding.

FROM THE UNCONSCIOUS TO THE CONSCIOUS

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Abstract

As a systematic evaluation of our belief systems, general semantics (GS) serves as a methodology to view our own and others’ attitudes toward prejudice and bias. With the thoughtful application and use of GS, the concept can help to address, understand, and overcome some of our prejudices and biases. Additionally, processing our thoughts-actions-feelings etc., through GS, aids us in viewing each person as an individual, no matter the race, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, culture, national origin, disability, language, socioeconomic status, intelligence, height, weight, attractiveness, etc. In raising our level of social unconscious bias to that of the level of the social consciousness, by “thinking about our thinking,” we can take the first step in understanding the many perspectives we operate from, in, and around. Throughout this discussion, GS looks at methods in which to add to and extend the developing sense of self-awareness to better address the issues of prejudice-bias in daily interactions and interpersonal relations.
ON BELIEF SYSTEMS

BOB EDDY

Abstract

Three questions drive this paper: 1) what constitutes a belief system, 2) what standards can we use to evaluate belief systems, and 3) can competing belief systems co-exist and cooperate with modern science and technology for the benefit of humankind?

Starting with a definition of belief system, we juxtapose it with the related terms of world view, paradigm, and model. Wendell Johnson enters the treatise with his simple, poignant idea of “to-me-ness,” which fits in easily with the constructivist philosophy of knowledge acquisition. We then cover three standards we can employ to evaluate logic-derived belief systems. We treat revelation-derived belief systems as a special case. Both logic-derived and revelation-derived belief systems can succumb to fundamentalist disease. Finally, the author drops his impartiality and offers opinionated advice on helping humankind navigate the road ahead.

1. What Constitutes a System of Beliefs?

Nothing does. The verb “constitutes” fails in its attempt to circumvent the verb “to be” (as in “What is a system of beliefs?”). Both questions imply that the words “system of beliefs” refer to an entity that exists independently of us and has a natural structure of some kind. But words don’t mean... people mean. To-me-ness:

Wendell Johnson: “A scientifically oriented person exhibits a high degree of to-me-ness in his use of language.” (1)

So I rephrase the question to state, “What shall the term ‘belief system’ mean to me here?” I don’t engage in this GS-primer-approach out of cuteness. Rather, I do so because the distinction between discovering the “truth” (as in “something is...”) and constructing it (as in “I hold that...”) serves as a foundation from which we can step to a meta-level above belief systems to tinker with
them in order to make conflicting ones compatible. Seeing a belief system as a humanly constructed concept gives me, as a human, the right to step above it and tinker.

I’ll start with my definition of “belief.” [Forgive my regular use of “I.” Wendell made me do it.] Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (10th Edition) says of belief, “1: a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing.” I don’t even have to go to “2:” That will do fine. Belief involves confidence in one’s mind that a person or thing or concept deserves one’s attributing to it validity or merit of some sort. In other words, we can define belief as a “buy-in.” One can buy into Sir Isaac’s law of gravity or to Mohammed as Allah’s prophet.

Let me distinguish belief from knowledge, the latter producing a confidence level of 100%. By this definition, beliefs would vary in degree by levels of confidence (low, medium, high, etc.) whereas knowledge would portray but one degree: complete certainty. Where might we find this complete certainty...this confidence level of 100%? In science? No:

*James Burke*: “In spite of its claims, science offers no method or universal explanation of reality adequate for all time.” (2)

*Martin Gardner*: “There is no scientific theory today, not even a law, that may not be modified or discarded tomorrow.” (3)

*John Casti*: “…there are no universal, absolute, unchangeable ‘truths’ in science.” (4)

*William Poundstone*: “You might wonder when you can conclude that something is established beyond all doubt. The answer is: never.” (5)

The philosopher Richard Rorty acknowledges this by using phrases like “I one-quarter know...” and “I three-quarters know...”

In other words, science depends upon numerous people buying into various statements/propositions/hypotheses by attributing validity to them to one degree or another. But using this definition, we cannot distinguish between science, politics, religion, and cooking. Each has its competing recipes people variously buy into, and the recipes’ differences cause adherents to cry out, “Let the games begin!” and they then disturb the peace of the planet.

If we can agree upon belief system and system of belief as arbitrary-but-useful to-me terms, we should also welcome to the fold terms such as model, paradigm, and world view.
To me, the term *model* will refer to the lowest level, most discrete referencing of a portion of reality. Thirty-two-feet-per-second-squared exemplifies, to me, a *model*—the lowest, most discrete representation of the force of gravity—its acceleration rate.

Moving up the scale of generalization, we come to Newton’s assumptions about speed and acceleration (time and distance as absolute) vs. Einstein’s (time and distance as relative) and we have two *paradigms* (absolute vs. relative) into which we can subordinate the 32-feet-per-second-squared *model*.

Move up another notch to *world views*, of which I see two major contenders: modernism (we can discover an absolute truth) and post-modernism (we cannot discover an absolute truth). Both Newton’s and Einstein’s paradigms fit nicely into the modernist world view, but quantum physics has to be shoehorned in because of its post-modernist implications—which tells us that modernism and postmodernism don’t constitute a clear dichotomy. Of course they don’t. We just invented those two terms!

I define *belief systems* (and the unnecessary *system of beliefs*) as a step above *world views*. Both the modernist and postmodernist world views involve logic as a way of knowing. Revelation plays a role in neither. But we justify some beliefs (e.g., religious and aesthetic) based upon “knowledge” that comes to us not from words/thinking/logic but rather from levels of confidence or ahah!s created by seemingly out-of-our-mind sources...moments of indescribable clarity...of awarenesses which we buy into 100% but can’t explain very well to others. So, to me, *belief system* includes both logic-derived world views and revelation-derived “knowledge.”

Thus we have constructed a taxonomy of belief:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief System</th>
<th>World View</th>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Model</th>
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I construct these classifications as arbitrary, relative, and not mutually exclusive.

2. Do Standards Exist for Evaluating Different Belief Systems?

Science has hammered out standards/criteria for evaluating theories, hypotheses, laws, et al. They include:

- method of constructing: deduction and/or induction
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- falsifiability (a la Popper)
- symmetry (a la Weinberg)
- simplicity (a la Occam)
- beauty
- fit with other accepted theories, laws, etc.
- fit with results of experiments
- replicability of those experiments
- concurrence of the scientific community, etc.

I buy into the constructivist paradigm within the postmodernist world view, which posits that we construct new models and then fit them into our previously constructed body of knowledge, like an engineer might install a new component into an existing piece of machinery. As standards for the installation, the engineer uses form, fit, and function. Does the component 1) have simplicity of design (form), 2) fit into the pre-existing machinery well (fit), and 3) work (function)? So when we learn (install a new piece of knowledge into our mind’s pre-existing knowledge structure) I evaluate that installation with the standards of form, fit, and function. Does the new concept carry Occam’s simplicity (form), mesh well with the previous knowledge (fit), and work for me (function)?

These criteria/standards work well with all logic-derived elements within a belief system because they, too, derive from logic. We construct those standards as we construct the knowledge they evaluate. The standards do not impose an artificial absoluteness (either-or). Rather, they highlight the degree of buy-in (confidence level) appropriate to me.

And they fail us in matters of revelation. In fact, I cannot conceive of a logical standard to use in evaluating revelation-derived knowledge. What might it require? That the candlepower of the vision meet a minimum quantity? That the ahah! last a minimum number of days, months, or years? Revelations seem refractory to logical evaluation. We can judge logic-derived belief systems with logic-derived standards. Perhaps we can only judge revelation-derived belief systems with revelation-derived standards. And that would mean both transactions...the revelation and its evaluation, will occur within the mind of one, single individual. To everyone else they will seem as hearsay.

3. Can Holders of Competing Belief Systems Mutually Co-Exist and/or Cooperate with Modern Science and Technology for the Benefit of Humankind?
Despite the above quotes about the non-absoluteness of science’s knowledge, numerous people, scientific and lay alike, believe that science has achieved a confidence of 100% in certain laws, theories, etc. Because they feel we have uncovered the fundamental truths about reality (like “fundamental particles”), let me label them “fundamentalists.” They own the “right” knowledge and those who don’t share it suffer from ignorance. Please recognize, however, that “fundamentalists” don’t exist (just as so-called “terrorists” will label themselves as “freedom fighters”). I use the term to arbitrarily denote a tendency (perhaps within all of us to one degree or another) to think, with pride, that we have achieved the absolute truth.

Those who claim revelation-derived knowledge can also migrate into fundamentalism...perhaps even more so. I have no problem with revelation-based knowledge. Tchaikovsky just wiggled his quill and the music “came from somewhere.” We probably have very active subconscious processes that mull over various inputs while we do other things, then spring their conclusions on us in flashes of light (sometimes with the help of chemical stimulants). My problem commences when revelation turns into fundamentalism (“I have the right revelation, you have a wrong one, therefore you die!”).

The owners of revelation also have a problem: how to tell us about it. The moment they choose words to describe it, they enter the domain of general semantics. The words and word-systems they select to describe their epiphanies suffer from the imperfections of denoting, connoting, translating, hermeneutics, non-allness, reification, et al. While the revelation might have seemed beautiful, the telling of it will degrade to Rube Goldberg, ad hoc, jury-rigged approximations: “Let me tell you about ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It has lots of exceptions, like accidentally stepping on bugs and defending your country, and...” The revelatee cannot transfer the beauty of his experience to us. Instead, we will receive the same ol’ same ol’: words.

Within all the logic-derived belief systems, world views, paradigms, and models, the cooperation we seek “for the benefit of mankind” has a major enemy: fundamentalist hubris. If the participants adopt Wendell Johnson’s to-me-ness humility, they have hope for negotiating through any conflicts between knowledge structures—even those Donald Davidson describes as “incommensurable.” As a matter of fact, the success of science has thrived on that constructive conflict: alchemy giving way to the mathematics of determinism, which has softened its stance with relativity, quantum indeterminancy, chaos theory, and who knows what next (superstrings?)

People who espouse Wendell Johnson’s epistemological humility with the simple phrase “to-me” can negotiate humankind into reasonableness...both in the sense of using reason (logic) and achieving reasonable, balanced progress.
Should we have hope for humankind’s road ahead? Yes. But the fulfillment of that hope will depend upon humility, with fundamentalism (in science, politics, religion, or cooking) as the main roadblock. Because I am optimistic, I view fundamentalism not as an end-of-the-road chasm, but rather as a speed bump. Our species has overcome fundamentalist after fundamentalist over the course of history. When sincere, humble seekers engaged in the good fight of honing their knowledge structures, the fundamentalists, those who were intolerantly persecuting “the wrongness of the heretics,” became, themselves, the casualties along that road, unmasked as epistemological bullies.

How will humility gain the upper hand (if it hasn’t already)? By sincere folks keeping their minds open to new models, paradigms, world views, and belief systems. By championing their positions in the good fight...and winning and (yes!) even losing the frays. By people debating the subject of belief systems in general. By meetings just like this, all over the world.

NOTES

“CONSPIRACY THEORY” AND SOUND ARGUMENTATION:
*The Method of Cocaine Politics for resolving “Conflicting World Views”* (excerpt)

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**UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, COURTESY APPOINTMENT**

**Introduction:**

Recent work in communication and cultural studies has shown that, more than most other terms, the concept of “conspiracy”—a group of people acting in secrecy for an unlawful purpose—has become layered with so many emotional connotations, that the term is more volatile than meaningful. In fact, “conspiracy” is more frequently elevated from a noun to a more abstract concept in the phrase “conspiracy theory.” Every conspiracy theory—from the ascent of Richard III to the English throne to the alleged connections between the Bush-Bin Ladin family—has its vociferous adherents and detractors.

Mark Fenster’s *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* both moves forward scholarly examination of the contested term “conspiracy theory” and suggests an excellent area to examine the conference’s theme of Confronting the Challenges of Conflicting World Views. It is the plan of this paper to 1) review the work of Fenster’s acknowledged predecessor, Richard Hofstadter on the notion of “conspiracy” in American politics, then to 2) review Fenster’s additions to Hofstadter’s critique of the term “conspiracy theory,” thus emphasizing how the term continues to be a source of conflicting world views, and finally to 3) suggest preliminary strategies for cogently and meaningfully debating a given conspiracy theory by examining Peter Dale Scott and Jonathan Marshall’s model text *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies and the CIA in Central America.*
Hofstadter’s “Pathology” of “Conspiracy Theory”

Hofstadter is credited by Fenster and others with having begun ground-breaking work on the concept of conspiracy theory with his 1963 Oxford lecture that was later published in *Harper’s* under the title “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.” With this essay, Hofstadter commented on two aspects of conspiracy theory that are with us today—the tremendous scope of such conspiracy theories and the self-righteous attitudes of those who believe and oppose such conspiracies.

First, more than a group executing secretive and criminal behavior, conspiracies are seen by the theorist as a force in shaping history. To establish this meaning of conspiracy, Hofstadter examines conspiracies of the 18th and 19th centuries in American political discourse and finds that he can use “political rhetoric to get at political pathology.” This “pathology” is shown in conspiracies attributed to Illuminati, Freemasons, Catholics and then Jews. In each case, Hofstadter finds that rather than building clear evidence in support of a given theory, the theory itself is used as evidence in support of particular political parties that espouse “American values” or “American liberty.” In the political situation created by the conspiracy theory, these vague positive values are held up against the specific but unsupported accusations of evil and conspiracy, thus creating the fallacy of the undistributed middle, a non-existent middle-ground between political extremes. The pattern for this development, Hofstadter says, arises from a “folk movement of considerable power.” Such “movement” against this conspiratorial network of, say, Freemasons, gained “the support of several reputable statesmen who had only mild sympathy with its fundamental basis, but who as politicians could not afford to ignore it.”

The second element that balances the evil of the conspiracy is the hero who recognizes and warns of global manipulation by the conspiratorial network. Such a hero would be “a member of the avant-garde who is capable of perceiving the conspiracy before it is fully obvious to an as yet unaroused public. The paranoid is a militant leader. He does not see social conflict as something to be mediated and compromised, in the manner of the working politician.” This hero’s “demand for unqualified victories leads to the formulation of hopelessly demanding and unrealistic goals.”

Hofstadter’s analysis presents a prime example of the conference theme, “conflicting world views,” for the extreme adherence to the belief of the evil conspiracy creates its opposite: the extremely virtuous and moral anti-conspirator. Summarizing this polarizing view—what he calls “the paranoid style”—Hofstadter writes,
History is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power, and what is felt to be needed to defeat it is not the usual methods of political give and take, but an all-out crusade. The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms—he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values.

The polarizing effect, which above Hofstadter describes as “demonic forces” opposed to an “all-out crusade,” continues today but with the additional layers of our ironic culture.

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**BELIEFS AFFECTING HANDWRITTEN COMMUNICATION (excerpt)**

**KATE GLADSTONE**

In a world of high technology, some find handwriting unimportant. They may look with bemusement, for example, on Wendell Johnson’s listing of poor penmanship among the communication difficulties amenable to a general semantics approach (“The Urgency of Paradise,” *People In Quandaries*, p.475). In fact, Johnson not only lists “inadequate handwriting skill” among the deficiencies of written communication, within that listing he gives it first place:

B. Writing deficiencies
   1. Inadequate handwriting skill
      a. Due to faulty training
      b. Due to maladjustment
      c. Due to organic conditions, such as paralysis, etc.

Does handwriting today matter as much as this listing suggests it may have mattered to Johnson? If so—if adequate or inadequate handwriting skill really does still make a difference in the computerized high-tech world of 2003—how, if at all, does this relate to a conference on belief-systems and their impact?
Why it Matters

Five years ago, a hospital administrator who had learned about the handwriting-improvement services I provide informed me that the doctors at his facility fortunately needed no such thing, “because we have entirely computerized the hospital. Starting in three months, all hospital records will use our integrated technology system.”

Last year, the same administrator reminded me of the conversation and stated that the hospital needed my help—putting “all” hospital records and procedures into computerized form had not entirely eliminated handwriting. Approximately one in a hundred daily communications at this hospital continued to involve or to produce handwritten data—and, about half the time, those handwritten data did not permit clear, easy, or certain reading. The results included not only patient deaths, injuries, and delay of care, but (more disturbing in the eyes of that particular administrator) a potential for malpractice suits. (The past five years had already seen the first medical-malpractice suit related solely to a death-by-handwriting issue—Vásquez versus Kolluru, 1999 with a $450,000 judgment. Another suit, initiated in 2002 and now pending in New York State, revolves entirely around an infant death caused by an unclearly written decimal point.)

The impact of handwriting goes far beyond medical error. I hear almost daily, for instance, from teachers who have realized that they cannot write clearly enough for the students to read it. One first-grade teacher wrote “cat” identically with “cut” and “eat” for years, and habitually made other similar errors, before noticing this and beginning to suspect that it might have something to do with the prevalence of slow readers in her classroom. A college-chemistry teacher sought my help because, whenever she wrote on the board during lectures or labs or tests, at least half the class would erupt into worried whispers: “What did she write? Can somebody read it?” The class had no problem reading typed worksheets, which suggests that the inquiries related to poor handwriting on the part of the teacher, not illiteracy on the part of the students.

Worse portends—the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), will add a handwritten-essay section counting for 1/6 of the student’s score in 2005. According to advance information released to media by the Educational Testing Service, which creates and administers this test, students will have 20 minutes to write a two-page essay which graders will have 4 minutes to read and score. Teachers and students have commented to me that (in their opinion and experience) few American high-school students, given 20 minutes to handwrite two pages, could do this legibly enough that 4 minutes would suffice to decipher, let alone to grade, the result.
How this Relates to General Semantics

People who seek my help for handwriting (or who send a child, student, or employee to me for help) usually see their/others’ handwriting problems as arising only from factors related to faulty training and/or a disability of some kind. They do not normally imagine or consider (and I myself once did not imagine or consider) that a person’s beliefs about communication in general, and about handwritten communication in particular, could also play a part in both causing and remediating a handwriting problem.

I began to change my views—and to consider as an important factor what Johnson calls “maladjustment”—when, over and over, I encountered clients who worked with me on handwriting-skills—who visited medical specialists, if needed, to do whatever they could do for any organic condition—yet who showed little or no improvement despite their efforts, my efforts, and the efforts of other specialists. I began understanding the situation differently when I heard one student’s chance comment: “I realize I need to change this [pattern of poor writing], but I know I can’t really change this because my handwriting is me. If I could change it, I would stop being me.” Hearing this led me to listen for, and to think about, similar comments from other students in my individual and group classes. I have begun to isolate some of the specific semantic “maladjustments” (false-to-fact beliefs impeding success) which (in at least some cases) play a part in creating and/or maintaining a handwriting difficulty.

Example: 36-year-old “Dave” asked for ways to correct his serious handwriting errors, which (according to his statement and that of his employer) interfered with the successful performance of his job. Dave stated, however, that he “could not” accept any correction which would involve changing any detail in the way he wrote one or more letters, e.g., he would not accept closing the tops of \( a/d/g \) to differentiate them from \( u/c/l/y \). (These letters had provoked the most complaints from his employer, who had referred him to me as a “last chance” before firing.) When I asked Dave why he said that he “could not” accept specific changes, he replied: “Handwriting is something I do and so it is me. Every detail of my handwriting is my handwriting, so changing it would mean changing me, which I am not prepared to do. I know that I need to change, so I feel I need to have you give me an overall change that would be a change without changing any specific thing, because changing specific things would be changing me, and I have an issue with that. I never closed the tops of my \( a \)’s, so I don’t think I’m going to start now.”

Dealing with this: I spent a few minutes discussing with Dave his identification of “a handwriting” and “the person who made the handwriting,” remind-
ing him (e.g.) that a set of written marks on paper does not “equal” a person. A person uses handwriting to represent himself (as in a signature), to convey his/her ideas (as in other written communications), but producing handwriting (plainly) does not equal producing a person (or we would have already had cloning for several thousand years by this time!). As the word differs from the thing, so handwriting differs from the person who produced it.

Example: One mother brought her 9-year-old son “Frank” to me at the request of his teacher who reported that he seemed “entirely unmotivated to write readable.” Early in the visit, the mother anxiously asked if some way existed to make sure that learning to write legibly wouldn’t lower Frank’s IQ. The question puzzled me and I asked Frank’s mother what had brought that possibility to mind for her. She answered: “Everybody knows that the intelligent and creative people write so you can’t read it; the people with legible writing are dull and dumb and boring. So if Frank figures out how to write so that his teacher can read it, won’t that take away his IQ and make him dull and boring?”

Dealing with this: It occurred to me that what Frank’s mother claimed “everybody knows”—that “dumb and boring” people write so that we can read it—might well have something to do with Frank’s lack of motivation in this regard! Not wishing to embarrass or contradict, I met the mother on her own level, agreeing that we certainly did not want to risk doing anything that might lower intelligence. “So let’s find out for sure whether or not legible writing always does mean ‘dull and dumb and boring.’ Before you and Frank even start the handwriting-exercises I’ll give you to do at home this week, I’d like you both to look at the handwritings of people you know, and see if all the legible ones really do come from ‘dull and dumb and boring’ people, and if all the illegible ones really do come from ‘intelligent and creative’ folks. You could also look up famous people on the Internet—a lot of websites about famous people include samples of their handwritings. Let me know what you find—do all the creative, intelligent, famous folks really scribble? Absolutely all of them? Or do some of them actually write so you can read it?”

They did the experiment, found at least a few intelligent and creative legible writers: Frank became willing to work on handwriting, showed noticeable improvement, and his mother stopped worrying that the improvement would ruin his fine mind.
DREAMS, NIGHTMARES, AND NONVIOLENCE

ALLEN FLAGG

Gregory Bateson, in one of his lectures, asked “Do you see me?” The audience murmured assent, that of course they saw him in front of them. But he pointed out that what their nervous systems were perceiving were patches of moving colors in their cortices that they had learned to interpret. Their quick responses showed their lack of consciousness of abstracting.

In a similar way, if I ask “Who are you?” , a quick response may be to give your name, showing the lack of awareness of an organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment. A person’s life experiences should be included, and, further, the recognition of having a mind-body of the genus homo, with roots in the archaic past, as Alfred Korzybski points out.

Using the terms “colloidal” and “cortico-thalamic,” he emphasizes the underlying “animal” aspects of our species, and cautions us to be careful in our responses, taking time to evaluate appropriately when presented with an environment that may provoke fear, anger, hunger, or sexuality. Responses should be tempered with an adult human consciousness of abstracting.

Humans, as well as mammals in general, process abstractions that we call dreams and nightmares. Few people in our Western society pay attention to these subjective happenings, but in Malaysia the Senoi, Temiar, and Semai groups of aboriginal peoples worked with their dreams and nightmares on a continual basis, as reported by anthropologists Kilton Stewart, Robert Dentan, Sue Jennings and Marina Roseman, and ethnologist Richard Noone. The communal sharing of dreams and utilizing dream music, songs, dances, stories, designs and inventions, the researchers reported, resulted in such a harmonious lifestyle that Dentan titled his book The Semai, A Nonviolent People of Malaya.

This learned collaboration between “conscious” and “unconscious” can start with the awareness of other common verbal splits such as mind-body and feeling-thinking. Isolating the two sides of the hyphen leads to separating the organism into parts that tend to operate autonomously. Alfred Korzybski has written
that “(i)t should be remembered that in the human nervous system the co-
ordinated working of the higher and lower centres is a necessity for the optimal
working of the whole” (Science and Sanity, p.511). He points to “…the non-
aristotelian type of communication found in general semantics which is based
on proper evaluation, made possible by thalamo-cortical integration” (p.xlix).
He emphasizes “…the benefit in enlarging the field of ‘consciousness’, by bring-
ing into ‘consciousness’ important factors of the ‘unconscious’ and thereby
counteracting the semantic possibility for arrested development or regression”
(p.503).

Korzybski has the human organism beginning 100 million years ago (p.494),
evolving through the ages to its present form. The primitive fear of snakes, of
falling, of strangers, of darkness and the unknown, come from archaic times.
The love of family and friends, the need for food and protection, Abraham
Maslow’s lower needs of survival, for procreation, come from this period in
evolution. These “animal” needs, instincts and energies were useful in the con-
tinuation of the human species. We copy animals in many of these ways, but
should do so with consciousness of abstracting at the human level.

These factors become the source of many dreams and nightmares, but little
attention is paid to them in our society. We need to understand and evaluate the
output of our unconscious processes, experiencing them from both a rational
and an emotional point of view, thereby increasing the content of our conscious
(p.500).

The interaction between these levels of conscious and unconscious would
optimally take the form of remembering dreams and nightmares, recording them
by telling, writing, drawing, painting and otherwise reproducing them in the
conscious waking world. This engaging in dialogue between conscious and
unconscious can be taken to another level, by inquiring of a dream symbol, in
conversation in a dream, fantasy or re-dream, to understand their potential mean-
ing.

This procedure, enhancing Korzybski’s prescription, has been proposed by
a number of authors:

- Fritz Perls, in “Gestalt Therapy Verbatim,” assumes that every dream
  symbol represents some aspect of the dreamer, and asks a participant
to “become” the dream tree, or dog, or person, and communicate
what it means to be that dream symbol.

- Eugene Gendlin, in “Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams,” asks the
dreamer to focus on the bodily felt sense of the dream and verbalize
that sense.
Robert Moss, in “Conscious Dreaming,” tells that his daughter Sophie, being chased by dream monsters, put on a dragon costume and chased them back.

Edgar Bergen, as reported by Jean Houston in “A Mythic Life,” would talk with his dummy Charlie McCarthy, asking profound questions and getting astounding answers.

Judith Malamud, in “Learning to Become Fully Lucid,” writes that fully lucid dreamers are aware of creating their dream, and that such awareness may also foster awareness of one’s creative role in life generally.

Kilton Stewart wrote in “Pygmies and Dream Giants” that Philippine Negritos would ask for a dream message from the image of a deceased parent, to end a period of mourning. Stewart thought that the neglect of the dream in Western education was a blind spot that made us stop short of a crimeless, warless civilization.

Our task in dreaming is to work at communicating with images that may have something to tell us about ourselves. It’s not surprising that children have nightmares, with so much unknown and having so much to learn from people bigger and stronger. Listening to a child’s nightmare, or a friend’s, will help put the experience into perspective. Sigmund Freud referred to the “id,” Carl Jung to the “shadow,” when writing on the primitive, archaic aspect of the human psyche. Georg Groddeck, a pioneer in psychosomatic studies and a colleague of Freud’s, called this deep self the “it,” and proposed that this level of the organism influenced all experiences. One’s own fears and insecurities can be projected onto others, and symbolized in dreams in many kinds of images. Since the 9/11/01 attack on the World Trade Center dreamers have reported being chased by people in Arabian style clothing. Using this imagery to portray fearful aspects in one’s personal life can unfortunately become a stereotype that can be used in the waking world, creating prejudicial behavior. We need to practice consciousness of abstracting and understand our symbolizing processes, to control our tendencies to violence.
TOWARD A CIVIL SOCIETY:
Anger Management Using GS and the Techniques of the Professional Actor (excerpt)

Katherine Liepe-Levinson

How do actors learn to manage and control their emotions on stage at a drop of the hat? This workshop employs general semantics formulations and the traditional rational-emotive behavior modification techniques first set forth by Dr. Albert Ellis (and later espoused by health gurus such as Andrew Weil, Tony Robbins, and Depak Chopra). The workshop demonstrates the ways professional actors actually use the same basic techniques and formulations to control their emotions on stage. Through a series of group activities, individual exercises, and role-plays, this workshop offers participants concrete methods to use to more effectively and constructively manage and control their anger in “real life.” If we are to manage the conflicts of nations, first we must be able to better manage how we act in the world as individuals.

Rationale: Dr. Jerry Wilde emphatically states in his book Anger Management in Schools: Alternatives of Student Violence, that it is very difficult, if not impossible for children or adults to focus or learn at all without first having a sense of both physical and emotional safety or security. To support his claims, Dr. Wilde turns to psychologist Abraham Maslow, founder of humanistic psychology. Maslow first became known through his description of “the hierarchy of basic needs,” which drives all human motivation. At the bottom rung of Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs are the “survival needs”—the physiological needs for air, water, and food. Second on Maslow’s hierarchy is the need safety and security. Similar to Korzybski’s structural differential and the scientific method of reasoning or abstracting, the lower level needs and specifics on Maslow’s hierarchy must be addressed first before one can move on to the higher order concerns or the needs of love, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Therefore, Wilde suggests that we need to address the lower order need for
anger management—not simply for our physical safety and welfare, but for our very growth and development as human beings.

One of the challenges in both teaching and attempting to practice anger management is the fear that if we work to manage our anger—we risk being taken advantage of by others—we risk becoming someone else’s “door mat.” But often in our attempt to “stand up for ourselves,” some of our knee-jerk or “signal responses” to stressful, frustrating, disappointing, or unfair situations may ultimately harm us even more without changing or defusing the situation. From Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*, to the films, *The War of the Roses* (with Kathleen Turner, Michael Douglas, and Danny Devito) and *Changing Lanes* (with Ben Affleck and Samuel L. Jackson), the “one wrong turn deserves another” mentality fails to deliver a constructive or lasting solution to our various woes.

The goal of this anger management workshop is to offer techniques using general semantics formulations, traditional rational-emotive behavior modification methods, and techniques actors use to manage their emotions on the stage to enhance one’s communication skills and toleration of life’s frustrations and disappointments. These life skills will help us to make the most rational choices and decisions for ourselves while still respecting the rights of others—and therefore to successfully move up Maslow’s hierarchy of basic human needs to the higher order concerns.

This workshop in Anger Management Training:

Reviews several of the most established theories and therapeutic formulations used to manage anger, including the limbic brain approach (punish and reward, anger release/primal scream), traditional behavior modification (counting to ten, etc.), and the “family myths” and formal psychoanalysis methods.

Demonstrates the benefits of a general semantics/rational-emotive behavioral approach to anger management.

Teaches participants specific techniques to help them view and respond constructively to difficult or even unfair situations.

Offers specific methods to improve one’s overall communication skills to help participants experience a greater sense of personal and social control which relieves both stress and anger.

Demonstrates how to use the material as turnkey training for colleagues, parents, educators, and children.
A GENERAL SEMANTICS APPROACH TO REDUCING STUDENT ALIENATION

DR. MARTIN H. LEVINSON

This presentation will examine a study that showed students manifesting signs of alienation (a well-recognized drug abuse risk factor) could be helped to reduce those symptoms through a general semantics approach. It is based on research conducted for a Ph.D. dissertation titled “The Effects of General Semantics Instruction on Three Dimensions of Alienation Among Eighth and Ninth Grade Problem Students.” The results of the study demonstrated that general semantics can empower students to be more in control of their lives and to more closely identify with the goals of learning. Further details of the research can be found in chapter eight in Martin H. Levinson, The Drug Problem: A New View Using the General Semantics Approach (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

Research Description

In common parlance the term “alienation” is used to describe the condition of being estranged or detached from one’s self, others, or society in general. But alienation as a research concept is more complex since it can be approached from a variety of different disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, and social psychology) and can take on a variety of different meanings—anomie, loss of self, despair, apathy, loneliness, rootlessness, powerlessness, isolation, pessimism, etc.

The study under review considered alienation from a socio-psychological perspective using a research model developed by Seeman that contains six researchable dimensions of alienation. Three of those dimensions, powerlessness (a state characterized by feelings of helplessness about not being able to influence situations), self-estrangement (a state characterized by feelings of detachment toward situations), and cultural estrangement (a state characterized by rebelliousness toward the goals and priorities of the institutions in which one must live, work, or study) were selected as variables for analysis and included in the three hypotheses of the experiment—that general semantics would reduce powerlessness, self-estrangement, and cultural estrangement.
General semantics, a re-educational discipline that combines an awareness of the role language plays in fostering communication and that emphasizes the use of the scientific method to solve everyday problems, was chosen to reduce the three aspects of student alienation. (Past educational studies indicated general semantics increases critical thinking skills, enhances creativity, improves personality adjustment, and decreases prejudice.)

Seventy eighth and ninth grade students participated in the alienation study and were randomly assigned, within grade, to experimental and control groups. This resulted in the formation of ten groups—three ninth grade and two eighth grade experimental groups and three ninth grade and two eight grade control groups—with seven students in each group.

The students in the experimental group received an alienation pretest, two introductory group development sessions, sixteen general semantics lessons, and an alienation posttest over a nineteen week span. The same format was employed with the control group students except instead of general semantics lessons they received traditional guidance oriented lessons. All the groups met once a week for forty-five minutes (a standard school period).

To counter possible expectancy effects (a research science phenomenon that can occur when investigators unintentionally alter their behavior in ways that bias their subjects in favor of the research hypotheses), the counselor leading the groups arranged for a colleague to be with him during group sessions. The feedback received from this colleague after each group meeting helped to ensure that all the lessons were being presented to the students in a fair and impartial way. To determine baseline levels of student alienation the Pupil Attitude Questionnaire (PAQ), a research instrument containing sub tests that measure Seeman’s dimensions of powerlessness, self-estrangement, and cultural estrangement was administered to each of the students at the beginning of the experiment. The PAQ pretest results indicated that the experimental and control group students were highly alienated in equivalent degrees.

At the conclusion of the experiment, the students were examined with a PAQ posttest, and pretest and posttest means were computed on the three experimental variables for each of the groups. Then pretest means were subtracted from posttest means within, and a t-test was computed between the gain scores of the experimental and control groups. (All tests of significance were conducted at the .05 level. Experimental mortality was not a factor since all the students who took the pretest also took the posttest.)

The tests showed exceptionally strong support for all three hypotheses, beyond the .001 level. This high level of support held for both eighth and ninth grade groups.
Examining the Results

To reduce student alienation, the study and practice of general semantics would have to empower the students in the experimental groups to be more in control of their lives and to more closely identify with the goals of learning. This was successfully accomplished using three basic approaches:

1. students were taught general semantics formulations and techniques for making effective evaluations and decisions;
2. students were instructed in general semantics problem solving methods; and
3. students were provided with a general semantics philosophy for thinking and for more mature behavior.

The following is a brief synopsis of some of the formulations and exercises that were taught to these students underlying these approaches.

Approach #1

General Semantics Formulations and Techniques for More Effective Evaluations and Decisions

a. The value of a “delayed reaction”: To make effective evaluations and decisions, general semantics supports the use of “delayed reactions.” This technique, which involves the human ability to consciously engage one’s higher brain functions and delay reacting in order to appropriately evaluate a situation before one acts, tends to produce much better results than reacting quickly or impulsively in most situations.

b. Distinguishing facts from inferences to avoid jumping to wrong conclusions: To make accurate assessments of situations, and to avoid jumping to wrong conclusions about them, it is important to know how to distinguish facts from inferences.

c. The dangers of negative self-inferences: The question is not whether or not we make inferences; the question is whether or not we are aware of the inferences we make.

d. The importance of subjectivity in making evaluations: WIGO (what is going on) is never WIS (what I say) and WIS (what I say) is never WIGO (what is going on).
Approach #2

*General Semantics and Effective Problem Solving*

a. The scientific method: To help students solve everyday problems more effectively, general semantics advocates using the scientific method (observe, test, evaluate). This approach, which has produced many important and useful scientific discoveries, views problems as challenges that call for active responses.

b. General semantics coping statements: A problem-solving approach employed by the students involved an exercise in which youngsters wrote down on a piece of paper a description of a problem they were having, a general semantics formulation that was relevant to the problem, and a coping statement based on the formulation.

Approach #3

*Achieving Greater Maturity through General Semantics*

Some general semantics concepts relating to this topic include the following:

a. The word is not the thing, the map is not the territory: Because someone says you are stupid does not make you stupid.

b. Beware the IFD syndrome: Going from Idealization to Frustration to Demoralization can result in “burnout”—putting in too much effort, not getting hoped for results, and feeling pretty lousy.

c. “Dating” things and events helps to remind us that changes occur over time: Joe\textsubscript{1992} is not Joe\textsubscript{2002}; the drug problem\textsubscript{1970} is not the drug problem\textsubscript{2000}.

d. “Indexing” items aids in their analysis: All members of a group are not the same (student\textsubscript{1} is different than student\textsubscript{2} is different than student\textsubscript{3}, etc.).

e. Adding a silent *etc.* to thoughts and statements increases an awareness that there is always more that can be said about something.
CHALLENGING CULTURALLY-EXPECTED WAYS OF THINKING

MILTON DAWES

This paper will serve as an introduction to a session where participants in small groups will discuss these questions: *How could we initiate an evolution in human evaluating? What challenges might initiators face? What social, economic, political, educational, and other problems, might such an evolution create?* Representatives from each group will be invited to present a summary of their proposals and concerns to the whole group.

Relative Invariance Under Transformation

... any group of people who possess physical means for destruction and still preserve infantile standards of evaluation become a menace to the culture of the whole race.

—Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity*

If we live in a modern world, but keep the ‘emotional attitudes’ of primitive bygone days, then naturally we are bound to be semantically unbalanced, and cannot be adjusted to a fundamental primitive ‘civilization’ in the midst of great technical achievement.

—Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity*

In the First World War (1914-18), the Polish generals, quite proud of their renowned cavalry, sent horses and men to do battle with German tanks. Men in tanks won that battle. Warfare had been transformed from men on horses with swords, to men in tanks with guns. The generals had not updated their ideas about warfare. Their thinking in this area remained relatively invariant.

In this 21st century, warfare, conflicts, etc., have been transformed. One man or woman (or child), with box cutters, guns, or bombs around their persons, viruses in bottles, and with cell phones, computers and global positioning devices, can now do great harm to hundreds of thousands of people. Governments and military personnel, with much pride and confidence in their military might and skills, continue to fight battles the old fashioned way—with
men in tanks, with missiles and bombs. Their thinking about warfare seems to me to have remained relatively invariant.

Through time-binding (the human ability to learn from past others, present others, and oneself; and to build on what has been learned), science and technology have given us tremendous powers. Men walked and drove around on the moon. Our skills in resolving our international and other conflicts have lagged way behind. Using cell phones, computers, the Internet, and other technological devices, it’s now possible for some we could label “mean low-down varmints, thugs, rascals, bandits, murderers, crooks, rascals, misfits, criminals, gangsters, and other unsavory types,” all over the world, to organize against other humans. Throughout history, there have been humans bent on world domination. Now these types have the technology to propagate and act out their beliefs, and do great damage.

We (those of us not numbered among the varmints, etc.), have to start thinking differently—and soon. Our present way of thinking involves among others: one-valued (it must be so); two-valued (it’s either this or that, either for us or against us, believers and unbelievers, etc.); elementalistic (ignoring interrelations); identity (what I think, feel, believe, etc., is so); allness (lack of awareness that we don’t know everything). This thinking scheme is entrenched in our individual conscious operations (sensing, thinking-feeling, evaluating, etc.); and in our way of relating with ourselves and with each other. We have created institutions, national policies, regulations, and laws based on this scheme. We seem not to have recognized the increasing complexities of our human relationships. So we persist in attempting to resolve our highly complex international human relationship problems and conflicts, in our usual relatively simplistic, elementalistic (forgetting interconnections), short term, political, economic, and militaristic way.

We have not yet, it seems to me, recognized or valued the importance of basing our policies and negotiations, on historical, anthropological, psychological, commonsensical, philosophical, tribal, cultural, and other perspectives. Our institutions, policies, regulations, laws, etc., all maintain and facilitate old ways of thinking. In many societies, the majority of inhabitants are adjusted to their particular ‘culturally expected ways of thinking’ (CEWT) and doing things. To ‘succeed’ one has to go with, and adapt to ‘cewt.’ So, many suggestions for significant change will be vigorously resisted and resisted. Many people benefit from the way things are going—and would like things to keep going that way—thank you very much. We have to find ways to encourage an evolution in evaluating, to match our technological accomplishments. (For more on “cewt”: See my article “Conscious Abstracting” at http://dfwcgs.net/milton/index.html.)
To meet the challenges of an increasingly complex world, we have to start thinking differently. We have to start thinking in terms of the welfare of the species—not in terms of immediate benefits to our particular tribe. We have to include long-term possibilities in our plans and decisions. We have to start thinking in terms of interrelationships and interdependence. We have to think in terms of “co-evolution”: If one nation moves, or is thought to be moving too fast ahead of others, it must expect resentment. If one nation appears to be too powerful, some will try to bring it down. In an increasingly complex and ever changing world, we cannot afford to hold our present ways of thinking relatively invariant.

Our technological accomplishments have raced far ahead of our wisdom to manage our human problems (many of which resulted from said technological achievements). Our education systems have not addressed to a significant degree our uncritical use of language. We have not as a species evolved to a higher level of self-consciousness and self-evaluation, and we find our record in resolving international conflicts over these many centuries shameful.

To minimize disasters and continuing human misery we have to revisit, and when necessary, revise our ideas, theories, and beliefs, to match new realities. We need an evolution in human evaluating. In a fast changing, increasingly diverse world, we could use the method of science and the approach of mathematics as our guidelines. Most cultures believe that science and mathematics work.

Bernard Lonergan, S.J., in his book *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* wrote: “A method is a set of directives that serve to guide a process towards a result.”

General semantics (based on the approach and method of science and mathematics) provides us with a method and many guidelines to help us improve ourselves as human beings. We can do better than we have been doing. The challenge for us humans: How to initiate an evolution in evaluating—without creating many more problems.
Before most of us arrive at work, or school, or even this conference, we have been exposed to dozens, perhaps hundreds, of media messages. You might wake up to a clock radio, stumble downstairs to turn on the TV while perking some coffee. While sipping that coffee, you might read a newspaper, or surf the net on your computer.

On your drive to work or school, you likely have a radio on in your car. You might see several billboards along the way. Once at the office, you could walk through a waiting room with magazines on a table. Then, you might check your e-mail before getting into the bulk of your day.

All of these media convey information, but also values, norms, sales pitches and images that go into forming what I call “mediated truths.” By that term, I do not only mean that media companies are bringing you the messages. I also mean that the intended meaning of them has been carefully mediated, or determined, by those within the media industry. They then are further mediated, or negotiated, by you as the receiver.

Without a certain awareness, and careful, critical scrutiny, your own mediation process might become quite passive. You might reject the messages as propaganda or garbage, and thus miss some important elements of them. Research shows that more of you are likely to rather passively digest the messages, and perhaps in a rather unthinking way accept the information, values and norms as truths.

It is my contention that we live and function very much within a mediated world—one that is of our own creation through our feelings, perception, etc. Increasingly over recent decades, media messages—ranging from advertising to entertainment to the news—feed and influence how we formulate those feelings and perceptions. Think of this world as a “bubble” around your head, filled with these images and values we have mentioned, that serves as a filter, in some cases even an obstruction, to your abstracting with the actual territory around you.

I contend that if you “buy into” these mediated truths you can be setting yourself up for a great deal of stress, possible strains in relationships and a lack
of tolerance for other world views and perceptions. Individual “goals” can become “demands” in this mediated world. Relationships can be judged by norms established in commercials or fictionalized media accounts rather than on their own strengths and weaknesses. Political and social views can be packaged and sold to you, as commodities. Other world views can be seen as threats, or obstacles, rather than simply diversity.

If you get entrapped within your own mediated world, you can lose touch with your actual environment—nature, friends and family, your community, etc. When you lose touch with that environment, which we will refer interchangeably to as the territory, you risk losing touch with yourself.

Thus, seeking what I label “unmediated truths” can become a very worthy and important effort. But, how do you seek such “truths”? I believe you can do so first by becoming more media literate, second by becoming more aware of your own abstracting process—from the sensory level all the way to the higher order levels of theories and world views—and third by recognizing differing structures between many mediated messages and the structure of the natural world.

General semantics has been my guide in 20 years of developing and teaching media literacy. Using it as my theoretical foundation, as well as practical guide, I developed two university courses, an outreach program to more than 30 middle and high schools in the U.S. and Australia, and have written two books. I am using general semantics now to develop a program and book called, “Seeking Unmediated Truths.” In this paper, I will draw from observations made during the presentation of this program and numerous courses in media literacy.

Two Worlds

The concept of “two worlds” should not be new to those who have studied general semantics. Alfred Korzybski wrote about the “intensional world,” of ideas, feelings, world views, etc., and a world outside our skins, what we often refer to as reality. Korzybski encouraged taking an “extensional” approach, to explore the territory beyond our own skin and to be aware of our own formulations, and what influenced them. (1)

S. I. Hayakawa applied general semantics ideas to analysis of propaganda. (2) Irving Lee used general semantics in teaching and researching verbal communications and rhetoric.

Most of these early general semanticists primarily looked at applications to the written and spoken language. Books, magazines and newspapers served as the primary media through most of their lives.
Of course, today, television and computer images dominate. We can create “virtual realities.” We have the technology to change the color of your sweater, put Oprah Winfrey’s head on Ann Margaret’s body (as actually was done in one publication), make Saddam Hussein or George Bush look like Adolph Hitler or have you take a virtual tour of Australia while sitting in Milwaukee. The spoken and printed word remains very important, but we also have to consider the power of visual images.

In recent decades, researchers such as Neil Postman, John Merrill, Geraldine Forsberg and yours truly have used general semantics principles to explore media messages of all types. (3)

The Mediated World

So what are the underlying values of this so-called mediated world? And, what factors go into shaping them?

Research in media show that children and adults pick up the following values as being important from various forms of media: (4)

- Consumerism and materialism. Success often is measured by what we own, where we live, what kind of car we drive or what clothes we wear in the mediated world.

- Patriotism. The United States’ way of life—freedom, free market economy, etc.—is the best in the world. This value has been conveyed even stronger since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack. Conversely, those who disagree with our way of life are considered the enemy, evil-doers, oppressors, etc.

- Physical attractiveness is very important. This value begins in teen magazines and other media geared at young people, especially female young people. It is carried on through adult media.

- Information must be entertaining. That means it must be relatively easy to understand—dumbed down in some of our opinions—fast-paced, delivered by those physically attractive people mentioned a paragraph earlier. (5)

- Individualism. You can be successful if you act aggressively and take on the world yourself. Work hard, compete, be tough. After all, it’s you against the world.

- The natural world primarily provides resources for humans—fuel, food, materials for shelter, recreation, etc.
These values, and others conveyed in media messages, should be understood as constructions that are shaped by world views and paradigms both in broader American society, and within the media industry.

So, a media message producer, like any citizen, is influenced by the broader cultural values, which are conveyed not only by media but also through family, peers, schools and other institutions. Meanwhile, that producer also is influenced by values and paradigms within the media industry. These include ways of doing business within that industry, and longtime values that often are used when making decisions about what is news or what should go into ads or entertainment products. These include values such as timeliness, making deadlines, proximity, conflict, personalization of issues, unusual qualities, etc.

The media producer is in a rather unique position in that the messages he or she produces are then sent right back out into the broader culture, and help feed the values and world views within that culture.

The Unmediated World

If you really examine the natural world—which we are calling the unmediated world—the structure and underlying values differ from those within the mediated world in many ways.

- Basic needs. The natural world requires inhabitants to acquire basic needs of food, shelter, perhaps fuel. It does not demand excessive consumption. It basically only requires that inhabitants do what they must do to survive.

- No boundaries. Political or governmental boundaries within the natural world are meaningless. Yes, some animals will guard a certain territory out of instinct, but this protective instinct does not develop from some philosophy or higher order image or theory. It is not furthered by propaganda.

- The natural world is very much an inner-connected system. Yes, it is true that the strong might survive over the weak, and that physical attractiveness is important in mating, etc. But, an eco-system balances itself out over time—unless human intervention or some other cataclysmic interference becomes involved. All living things in an eco-system are related in some way, and therefore depending on one another—whether it be as part of the food chain, etc.
Diversity abounds. Within the eco-system, diversity of species, etc. abounds. In fact, the system is very dependent on a diversity of living things to provide that balance mentioned in the previous section.

This is not a pitch for a “back to nature” movement. Nor is it trying to say we as humans should live like animals in the woods. In fact, this writer has enjoyed a great deal some aspects of the mediated world—financial gain, status, intellectual challenge, sense of achievement, and other rewards. But, to lose touch with the structure and values that can be found in nature creates the risk of disconnection from other living things and oneself. You can easily become entrapped in an either-or structure. If you adopt the values of the mediated world without thinking, you run those risks.

NOTES


4. Center for Media Literacy materials, Los Angeles, California; National Telemedia Council materials, Madison, Wisconsin; and original survey research done through the Milwaukee Media Connection media literacy outreach program at UW-Milwaukee.

RELIGION AS A BELIEF SYSTEM
(excerpt)

DR. ABDUL SALAAM

Man is absolutely the most favored creature; even to the point that it was said—which is true—that he is favored over the angels. The preference of man lies in his intellect. The intellect of man is what raised his status, and made him superior to all creatures. Therefore, it is necessary to understand this intellect and accordingly it is necessary to know what is thinking (at-tafkeer, and what is the method of thinking? (Tareeqat ut-tafkeer). This is because this reality designated as thinking is what gives the intellect its value, and what brings those elaborate fruits, with which life revives and man revives. The whole universe, including everything, even the inanimate beings, plants and animals, revive.

Sciences, arts, literature, philosophy, jurisprudence, language and knowledge are themselves the output of the mind, and consequently the output of Thinking. Therefore, it is necessary for the sake of man, life and the whole universe, that the reality of the mind is comprehended, and the reality of thinking and the method of thinking be comprehended accordingly.

Humanity has made this great advance in life and in the time, whilst being mostly concerned with the output of the mind and with the output of thinking, without being concerned with the reality of the mind and the reality of thinking.

—from: Thinking, by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani

I considered it might spark your interest if I started with some paragraphs from a publication entitled simply, Thinking, by a person who started an Islamic movement that I have found quite deep in its approach to what, when one hears the term “Islamic” or “angel,” rather quickly gets linked to religion—and I know the term ‘reality’ generally gets dittoed in the thinking of most general semanticists.

Since I have as a subject matter religion as a belief system, I have found I have a very daunting task to reduce with some clarity the term “religion” to a lower order of abstraction and then couple the specific religion I have chosen to focus on, Islam, with the idea of its functioning not just as a belief system but as
a coherent system for all human beings to live by, post 9-11—all in thirty minutes.

However, I can rest somewhat comfortably feeling that by and large this audience recognizes that whatever I say and for however long I have to say it, something will be left out. We understand then that this presentation can do no more than hint at some areas of a vast knowledge base that I have been interacting with for many years. With me, this exciting area of understanding goes back as far as Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad, men I knew well, and it is still evolving to date.

I certainly am willing to take responsibility for everything I say but I will not take responsibility for how you take what I say, since I don’t have a lot of time to explain what may be some controversial areas that may unfold. GS allows us to understand that I am giving as many talks as there are people in the audience. Some, with Islam so much in the news since 9-11—and I confess to being a Muslim—would, I suspect, like me to deal with a close analysis of Islam in day-to-day practice; some would like a substantial exposition on how I integrate GS and Islam; some will consider it important, as do I, that I be in tune with the Conference theme. But as Milton Dawes so often puts it, this is a story and it will be my story for whatever it sums up to be; that we know to be unavoidable. I understand that after my time has expired I will simply have to stop wherever I am in the presentation even though I may not be where I would like, but hopefully we can follow up some points in the discussion sessions.

I have been conversant with GS some twenty-seven years now and I have taken note that there has been an aversion to view what is generally labeled “religion,” when defined as a personal awareness or conviction of the existence of a Supreme Being influencing and controlling one’s own, humanity’s or all nature’s destiny, as a topic worthy of in-depth study and inclusion within general semantics literature.

There are some exceptions. One is a fairly lengthy chapter in Levels of Knowing and Existence by H. Weinberg entitled simply “Religion,” but I consider his writing a clear exception in the general semantics literature. Another one was an article printed in vol. 57, Summer 2000, of ETC entitled “Science, Religion and God: My Story” by Milton Dawes. I sensed he used the term “religion” in the most general sense, inferring, it seemed to me, that all religions are pretty much the same and he is not comfortable taking them too seriously. Well, as he said and frequently reminded us, he was telling “his story” and was gracious enough to state he would be ready to hear the stories of others who do not share his view.

I also recall a very negative article about prayer, using some examples from the Holy Quran and Islam, that I considered was probably placed in an issue of
ETC as a filler and I prefer not to dignify it with either an answer or a challenge. Then, too, there was William Pemberton’s article “Conflict Resolution for Major World Religions” in the same issue presaging to some extent the title of this very conference.

In this short presentation, religion, specifically Islam, as a belief system, indexed, Holy Quran, Prophet Muhammad, Abdul Salaam, I am putting forth some specifics that hopefully will help you to understand why I am comfortable in my acceptance of Islam, as a belief system that is certainly considered a religion, and how I mesh my understanding of the formulations of general semantics with ease in the context of that belief system. As suggested above, it is clear that many GSers feel religion is incompatible with general semantics. If religion is being considered in the abstract as an un-referenced word, I can understand that sentiment, but for me, the religion of Islam as I intend to sketch it in part, and general semantics as I have understood the formulations, are not altogether incompatible.

How then is religion generally viewed? Up until 9-11, religion, including Islam, was most usually thought of and practiced as a pattern of ritualistic worship—period. Many Muslims along with other religious adherents, in the sharply demarcated division between the Church and State environment characteristic of America, have acted in the same fashion. There is a particular day (or series of days) that a greater amount of attention is given to the contemplation of the existence of a Supreme Being, and depending upon one’s belief system and the set of scriptures adhered to, one does those things called for by the leaders of the religion for that period of time and that’s it. (I have noticed that by and large when Muslims are pictured, close to nine times out of ten you hear the Adhan (call to prayer) and Muslims are shown prostrating themselves in prayer. Is someone trying to get viewers to think that prayer and some “terrorist acts” are all that Muslims do? That doesn’t lead to much understanding.)

More often than not, once leaving the place of worship an entirely new series of behaviors may take place that have no bearing on or relation whatsoever to the professed religious beliefs. I know of no religion other than Islam, if not detached from its original sources, the Holy Quran, the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad, Ijma and Qiyas, (I am not going to try to explain those terms now) that embodies within its makeup a complete and full system of guidance for our behavior economically, socially, politically, administratively, educationally, militarily, and religiously. Since this conference, listed as an international one, has taken upon itself the Herculean task of Confronting the Challenges of Conflicting World Views with one of the subjects up for discussion being beliefs, belief systems and their consequences, I would like to start here, with you as a pilot study, in working through this problem of conflicts between belief sys-
tems, modern science, and technology. Since many of you may have some real hang-ups about religion, developing some understanding here might help it spread abroad.

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**RAMIFICATIONS OF JULIAN JAYNES’S THEORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS FOR TRADITIONAL GENERAL SEMANTICS**

**PHILIP ARDERY**

Good morning. Thank you for coming. In my talk, first I will explore why general semantics theorists for over 70 years generally have overlooked the human behaviors that give rise to the sharpest and most violent of today’s conflicts of world views—namely, religious behaviors. Second, I will introduce some theories formulated by cultural anthropologist Julian Jaynes which “explain” religion and which have helped me extensionalize my own definition of the so-called “verbal levels,” a general semantics term I previously had defined intensionally. I will close by haranguing you briefly with an argument that the perspectives opened up by Jaynes can help us strengthen general semantics doctrines.

I trace the general neglect of religion by general semantics theorists back to Korzybski’s own proud rejection of religious influences. He said this to students at the 1948-49 Institute of General Semantics intensive seminar:

I was born a Pole in Warsaw in a very peculiar family. My father was an engineer and for generations they were either mathematicians or senators, lawyers, economists, engineers, what not—all scientific, scientific, scientific…. [T]he milieu of the country was Catholic, but we didn’t have any need of any religion. We were not agnostic, we were not atheists, we were just scientific for generations, so although the milieu was Catholic, I was not contaminated…. This was very fundamental in my whole work. I was completely free. (1)
Korzybski’s freedom came at a price. Thanks to his freedom, he hardly understood religion, even failing to recognize the religious content in a major event in his own life.

Please look with me at the “Silent and Verbal Levels Diagram” which Korzybski first produced in 1943 and which he later titled “The Process of Abstracting from an Electro-Colloidal Non-Aristotelian Point of View.” (2) I want to use the diagram to make the point about Korzybski’s weak understanding of religion. Note the label on the “happenings” at Level I: external or internal happenings. I ask you to imagine that this person—myself—wants to understand pregnancy. Due to gender limitations, the internal happenings to which the name “pregnancy” applies never have and never will occur inside me. All chain-sequences of abstractings that might produce some pregnancy understanding in me necessarily must pass outside those people in whom pregnancy happenings can and do occur. My understanding of pregnancy, built up from abstractings circuitously routed through books, pictures, oral narratives, etc.,—compare that to the potential understanding of an equally informed person who is or has been pregnant, especially a person who has been pregnant until term and/or pregnant on multiple occasions. Which person’s abstraction almost surely preserves more intrinsic characteristics of first, second and third-level pregnancy? Which person’s abstraction has lost signal strength and become more cluttered with extraneous characteristics? The abstracting process that produced Korzybski’s understanding of religion parallels the process producing my understanding of pregnancy.

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![Silent and Verbal Levels Diagram](image-url)
The diagram shows clearly that our most vital processes actually happen on the silent non-verbal organismal levels, and so remain un-speakable. However, the verbal levels (IV) are of unique human importance because we can abstract on higher and higher verbal levels from I, II, III, etc. In human life IV represents means for inter-communicating and transmitting from individual to individual and generation to generation the accumulated experiences of individuals and the race....

Alfred Korzybski, 1946

What else does Korzybski say about religion? I’ll quote here the most summary of his statements that I have found, and acknowledging Harry Weinberg and Ramiro Álvarez as exceptions, it seems to me that our post-Korzybski theorists—at least until the convening of this weekend’s conference—have not much cared to say more. I’m reading from “What I Believe”:

In brief, any religion may be considered ‘primitive science’ to satisfy human unconscious organismal longings; and modern science may be considered ‘up-to-date religion,’ to satisfy consciously the same human feelings.... Religions and sciences are both expressions of our human search for security, and so predictability, for solace, guidance, feelings of ‘belonging,’ etc. (3)

The understanding of religion conveyed in that statement, I submit, amounts to little when stacked up against the understanding of a well-informed person who is or has been religious, especially a person who has been religious for a long time and/or religious on multiple occasions.


Traditional philosophy answered a few basic questions: The nature of the universe, man’s place in the universe,...the nature of God.... What province these questions belong to now seems apparent: The nature of the universe—that which can be found out—[belongs to] science, empirical science, in
particular, physics and cosmology. Man’s place in the universe—that which can be found out—empirical science and anthropology. The nature of God—Julian Jaynes’s studies of consciousness place this issue in “the middle of” linguistic, cultural anthropology. (4)

Jaynes, who by the evidence currently available knew nothing of general semantics, does not make God or religion a central concern in his writing. However, he uses religious data to bolster his theories of human language development and the origin of consciousness. In his book and his papers, Jaynes presents religion as deeply-rooted human behavior, free of “supernatural” components and capable of a doctrinal expression wholly compatible with general semantics.

This morning, I very much want to stir your interest enough to start you reading this book. If you aren’t familiar with Jaynes’s theories at all, please know at the start that he believes our human ancestors lived and labored and built civilizations without consciousness until as recently as 1000 BCE. He explains consciousness as an invention, like mathematics, made possible once human language developed to a sufficiently elaborated state. Consciousness persisted, he argues, thanks to its survival value after complex social interactions had broken down the prior mechanism for human decision-making, what Jaynes calls “the bicameral mind.” If I say things that sound vague or wrong or strange or obnoxious—and by the way, Jaynes’s language is not at all gender inclusive—please keep listening with an open mind as best you can. I wish to start my presentation of Jaynes by again referring to the abstracting diagram.

Unrevised since Korzybski’s death in 1950, but still a standard reference point for general semantics teaching, this diagram captions Levels I, II, and III as “Silent” and “Non-Verbal.” After reading Jaynes, I now see that this representation of the human abstracting process leaves out the verbalizing our earlier ancestors produced over tens of thousands of years. Only we recent humans have generated the labels, descriptions, the naming and “talking about” that belong to the diagram’s Level IV. Sub-Level-IV verbalizing, overlooked in the formulations of traditional general semantics, persists in all humans today and underlies the semantic reactions of religious behavior. (5) The string of direct quotes I am lifting from a 13-page span in The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind gives the relevant evolutionary time line hypothesized by Jaynes. The chart is from his paper “How Old is Consciousness?” (6):
200,000 B.C. - language evolves
40,000 - tool explosion
10,000 - first gods
9,000 - first towns
3,000 - writing begins
1,000 - divination, prophets, oracles
0
A.D. 1,000
2,000

The first stage and the *sine qua non* of language is the development out of incidental calls of *intentional calls*, or those which tend to be repeated unless turned off by a change in behavior of the recipient. Previously in the evolution of primates, it was only postural or visual signals such as threat postures which were intentional. Their evolution into auditory signals was made necessary by the migration of man into northern climates, where there was less light both in the environment and in the dark caves where man made his abode, and where visual signals could not be seen as readily as on the bright African savannahs....

The first real elements of speech were the final sounds of intentional calls differentiating on the basis of intensity. For example, a danger call for immediately present danger would be exclaimed with more intensity, changing the ending phoneme. An imminent tiger might result in ‘wah-hee!’ while a distant tiger might result in a cry of less intensity, and so develop a different ending such as ‘wah-hoo.’ It is these endings, then, that become the first modifiers, meaning ‘near’ and ‘far.’ And the next step was when these endings, ‘heh’ and ‘hoo,’ could be separated from the particular call that generated them and attached to some other call with the same indication.
The crucial thing here is that the differentiation of vocal qualifiers had to precede the invention of the nouns which they modified, rather than the reverse. And what is more, this stage of speech had to remain for a long period until such modifiers became stable....

The next stage might have been an age of commands, when modifiers, separated from the calls they modify, now can modify men's actions themselves. Particularly as men relied more and more on hunting in the chilled climate, the selective pressure for such a group of hunters controlled by vocal commands must have been immense. And we may imagine that the invention of a modifier meaning 'sharper' as an instructed command could markedly advance the making of tools from flint and bone, resulting in an explosion of new types of tools from 40,000 B.C. up to 25,000 B.C.

At this point, let us consider...the origin of auditory hallucinations.... The most plausible hypothesis is that verbal hallucinations were a side effect of language comprehension which evolved by natural selection as a method of behavioral control....

Behavior more closely based on aptic structures (or, in an older terminology, more 'instinctive') needs no temporal priming. But learned activities with no consummatory closure do need to be maintained by something outside of themselves. This is what verbal hallucinations would supply.

...[I]n fashioning a tool, the hallucinated verbal command of “sharper” enables nonconscious early man to keep at his task alone. Or an hallucinated term meaning “finer” for an individual grinding seeds on a stone quern into flour. It was indeed at this point in human history that I believe articulate speech, under the selective pressure of enduring tasks, began to become unilateral in the brain, to leave the other side free for these hallucinated voices that could maintain such behavior.

...[O]ne further step had to be taken, the invention of...names. It is, I suggest, as late as the Mesolithic era, about 10,000 B.C. to 8000 B.C. when names first occurred....

Up to this time auditory hallucinations had probably been casually anonymous and not in any sense a significant social interaction. But once a specific hallucination is recognized with a name, as a voice originating from a particular person, a significantly different thing is occurring. The hallucination is now a social interaction with a much greater role in individual behavior....
It is the open-air Natufian settlement at Eynan which shows this change most dramatically. Discovered in 1959, this heavily investigated site is about a dozen miles north of the Sea of Galilee .... Three successive permanent towns dating from about 9000 B.C. have been carefully excavated....

I have suggested that auditory hallucinations may have evolved as a side effect of language and operated to keep individuals persisting at the longer tasks of tribal life. Such hallucinations began in the individual’s hearing a command from himself or his chief. There is thus a very simple continuity between such a condition and the more complex auditory hallucinations which I suggest were the cues of social control in Eynan and which originated in the commands and speech of the king.

Now we must not make the error here of supposing that these auditory hallucinations were like tape recordings of what the king had commanded. Perhaps they began as such. But after a time there is no reason not to suppose that such voices could “think” and solve problems, albeit, of course, unconsciously. The ‘voices’ heard by contemporary schizophrenics ‘think’ as much [as] and often more than they do. And thus the ‘voices’ which I am supposing were heard by the Natufians could with time improvise and ‘say’ things that the king himself had never said.... Thus each worker, gathering shellfish or trapping small game or in a quarrel with a rival or planting seed where the wild grain had previously been harvested, had within him the voice of his king to assist the continuity and utility to the group of his labors.

We have decided that the occasion of an hallucination was stress, as it is in our contemporaries. And if our reasonings have been correct, we may be sure that the stress caused by a person’s death was more than sufficient to trigger his hallucinated voice....

If this were so for an ordinary individual, how much more so for a king whose voice even while living ruled by hallucination....

At Eynan, still dating about 9000 B.C., the king’s tomb—the first such ever found (so far)—is a quite remarkable affair. The tomb itself, like all the houses, was circular, about 16 feet in diameter. Inside, two complete skeletons lay in the center extended on their backs.... One wore a headdress of dentalia shells and was presumed to have been the king’s wife. The other, an adult male, presumably the king, was partly...propped up on stones, his upright head cradled in more stones....

I am suggesting that the dead king, thus propped up on his pillow of stones, was in the hallucinations of his people still giving forth his commands....
This was a paradigm of what was to happen in the next eight millennia. The king dead is a living god. (7)

Before adding one selection more to this extended strung-together lifting of text from Jaynes’s book, I want to paraphrase what Jaynes has hypothesized in the quotations just read. According to Jaynes, after the advent of language but before the advent of consciousness, human volition occurred as speech organized in one part of the brain—call it functionally the experience/intuition/inspiration center—and “spoken” or heard in different auditory centers of the brain. (I am skipping the physiology of all this, although Jaynes has lots of that in the book.) Their language development yet too primitive to support the invention of conscious mind-space, in which an “I” can narratize and question, our automaton-like human ancestors “obeyed” hallucinated voices. Jaynes finds excellent substantiation for his theory in Homer’s *Iliad*. My extended quotation now concludes:

During the eras of the bicameral mind, we may suppose that the stress threshold for hallucinations was much, much lower than in either normal people or schizophrenics today. The only stress necessary was that which occurs when a change in behavior is necessary because of some novelty in a situation. Anything that could not be dealt with on the basis of habit, any conflict between work and fatigue, between attack and flight, any choice between whom to obey or what to do, anything that required any decision at all was sufficient to cause an auditory hallucination....

Why should such voices have such authority...?

Sound is a very special modality. We cannot handle it. We cannot push it away. We cannot turn our backs to it.... Sound is the least controllable of the sense modalities....

Consider what it is to listen and understand someone speaking to us. In a certain sense we have to become the other person; or, rather, we let him become part of us for a brief second. We suspend our own identities, after which we come back to ourselves and accept or reject what he has said. But that brief second of dawdling identity is the nature of understanding language; and if that language is a command, the identification of understanding becomes the obedience. To hear is actually a kind of obedience. Indeed, both words come from the same root and therefore were probably the same word originally. This is true in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, German, Russian, as well as
English, where ‘obey’ comes from the Latin *obedire*, which is a composite of *ob* + *audire*, to hear facing someone. (8)

I expect a lot of you know this next story. It’s Korzybski’s account of how he came to produce the Structural Differential. In the tapes from the 1948-49 intensive seminar, he adds some detail, including the fact that he was trembling as he mounted the podium. Here’s the version published on the IGS website:

Shortly after *Manhood of Humanity* was published, I was invited for a symposium before the New School for Social Research in New York. To me the school was rather important because there were a lot of serious people there, educated, who took life seriously, and scientific research seriously. The school was then dominated by John Dewey and John Watson, the behaviorist. Both of these men heard something about my *Manhood of Humanity*, in which I claimed that man is *not* an animal, but in a category by himself…. [T]o them…it was all ‘bunk’….

In the meantime, as that group in the New School was so important and so intelligent, I was very eager to make good to that particular class in spite of Dewey and Watson, and I was eager to convey the difference between the reaction of man and dogs, cats, and so on…. I was struggling with myself how to convey that fundamental difference, and somehow under that stress, pressure of necessity—I would even use the word ‘emotional stress’—of conveying what I wanted to convey, as a flash, a diagram occurred to me, the diagram which today is known as and called the ‘Structural Differential.’ (9)

Korzybski’s experience at the New School correlates to Jaynes’s stress theory for induced hallucinations, triggered when a novel problem needs solution. In Korzybski’s case, given his well-known predisposition to visual rather than verbal “thinking,” he hallucinated a diagram, not a stream of words.

Jaynes suggests that the content of stress-produced hallucinations comes from “stored-up wisdom.” (10) Myself, I call Korzybski’s happy epiphany at the New School a religious event. In doing so, I don’t say he was “touched by an angel.” I have no high-order abstraction to inferentially explain what was going on at Level I. I have no pressing need to hypothesize what sparked the flash of inspiration that produced the Structural Differential. I *will* say that while in general semantics we traditionally characterize all human behavior events as the activity of an organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment, in religion we consider an alternative characterization of the same events as the activity of the environment-as-a-whole-in-an-organism. This second characterization, though perhaps greatly inferior for most scientific work, may have advantages for
investigating and explaining such phenomena as hypnosis, telepathy, or the Quaker “gathered meeting.”

Most people with religious lives are convinced that religion “works.” By cultivating with prayer and service the bicameral voices within him/her/me, the religious person arguably lives better for himself/herself/myself and for others. I said I will close by haranguing you with an argument that perspectives opened up by Jaynes point to an opportunity to strengthen general semantics doctrines. According to Jaynes, humanity today finds ourselves in transition between bicameral and conscious volition. His book supplies the promoters of consciousness, we people in general semantics, with one big “Eureka!”—a formulation of religion that speaks to the depths of religious behavior as manifested in so many conflicts in the world today. We have not had this previously.

But, armed with the one new formulation, before we rush to mount our white steeds and gallop off to convert the heathen to “consciousness of abstraction,” consider how unconvincing we must appear to Smith₁ out there—or, better stated, Mohamed₁. Willing and subscribing members of the culture and the nation that incarcerates as criminals the highest percentage of its own people, that arms tyrants to control the populations of non-U.S. jurisdictions, that stuffs the elderly into nursing homes, we Americans (yes, I am generalizing) have made the pursuit of individual “happiness” life’s main mission. Bicameral Mohamed₁ should declare independence from his extended family, should give up his five daily prayers and should replace his “zakat” or property gifts to the poor and needy with what—a weekend in Las Vegas?

As I said earlier, Jaynes has only passing interest in God and religion. In this book, in his many essays, over a lifetime of work, he pursued passionately one central interest, an understanding of what we call “consciousness.” I submit that we in general semantics have no answers to give Mohamed₁ until we first show we can make a difference in our own back yard. And I believe that those of you who will read Jaynes will exclaim a second and louder “Eureka!” upon discovering there a uniquely operational definition and in-depth understanding of consciousness and its current limitations. In service to the main objective in our educational program, to teach “consciousness of abstracting,” I ask you: Please, investigate what Jaynes has to say.

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5. Once I recognized that the Korzybski diagram provides no level assignment for verbal commands, e.g. “Stop!”, I then began to notice the same failure to represent other classes of verbalizing such as exclamations (“Ouch!”), supplications (“Help…”), affirmations (“Yes…”), etc.—author.


A GENERAL SEMANTICS VIEW
OF THE CHANGING
PERCEPTIONS OF CHRIST
(excerpts)

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MODERN PORTRAYALS OF JESUS IN WORKS OF ART
(RAE ANN BURTON)

Introduction

For centuries the image of Jesus’ physical appearance has been etched into people’s minds. Children learn in Sunday school at a young age what Jesus looked like. The most typical North American representation is a tall, lean, Caucasian man with long, flowing, light brown hair. The man has fair skin and light-colored eyes, but the typical North American image of what Jesus looked like is changing (Fillon p.68). This paper will look at some of the new ways in which Jesus is being portrayed in the 21st century. It will also discuss the relationship of how Jesus is portrayed to the study of general semantics.

The New Image of Jesus in Paintings in the 21st Century

The typical North American portrayal of Jesus is one that has definitely seen its share of changes. The most common image of Christ is that of a tall, lean man with long, flowing brown hair. It is the image that is instilled in most North American children and adults. Many artists are changing the image of Jesus, however, in works of art to reflect the changing culture of the 21st century. According to an article entitled, “The Computerized Jesus,” found at the website www.bbc.co.uk/religion, “The past hundred years has seen a greater variety than ever before. Christ patriarchal, youthful, subversive, mystical pacifist, human, satirical—and even all singing and dancing has been portrayed in many artistic works” (BBCi). Following are several examples of the new image of Jesus in the 21st century.
Stephen Sawyer—Modern Image of Christ

Stephen Sawyer is an artist from Versailles, Kentucky, who paints Jesus in a nontraditional fashion. Sawyer does not paint Christ as the typical image that North Americans are used to. His paintings rarely depict Jesus as a man in a white robe and sandals. Sawyer’s “Art for God” series consists of paintings of Jesus that he hopes will appeal to the youth of today (Artist’s 7C).

One of Sawyer’s goals is to depict Jesus in a contemporary setting as a contemporary man. He does just that in his work entitled, “No Appointment Necessary.” In this particular work, Jesus is portrayed as a handsome, muscular man wearing a T-shirt and jeans. Not only is Jesus wearing nontraditional dress in the painting, he is also sporting a red heart tattoo on his arm with the word, “Father,” printed across it (Artist’s 7C). A picture of, “No Appointment Necessary,” can be seen in appendix A. [Appendix not included here.]

Stephen Sawyer’s contemporary depictions of Christ are not solely limited to “No Appointment Necessary.” Another of Sawyer’s paintings entitled, “Undefeated,” portrays Christ in a boxing ring wearing boxing gloves. Jesus is also seen laughing in his painting, “Joy to the World.” It is clear that Sawyer’s depictions of Jesus are far from the traditional robed, gentle portrayals of Christ, and Sawyer has a definite mission behind his paintings.

In no way is Sawyer attempting to degrade Jesus as a religious figure or trying to be sacrilegious. According to an article by the Associated Press that can be found in the March 22, 2003, edition of the Kearney Hub, Sawyer states, “My mission is to accurately reflect the life and teachings of Jesus in the 21st century. I want to reach everyone with the message of Jesus” (Artist’s 7C). Several scholars of religion are using Sawyer’s works to teach classes at universities across the United States. In the same Kearney Hub article, John Zylka, a director at Plymouth Christian Academy in Plymouth, Michigan states, “One of Steve’s goals is to really bring Jesus into the 21st century, and I think it’s much easier for the youth to relate” (Artist’s 7C). Many other artists are taking an approach similar to Sawyer’s when portraying Jesus in their works.

Janet McKenzie—Black Image of Christ

Another example of a nontraditional portrayal of Jesus can be found in Janet McKenzie’s works. Just as Stephen Sawyer attempts to reach all walks of life with his depictions of Christ, so does Janet McKenzie. The most notable of McKenzie’s modern images of Jesus is seen in her painting entitled, “Jesus of the People.” The painting portrays Christ as a robed, haloed man. It is set on a pink background where a yin-yang symbol can be seen (First). According to Sister Wendy Beckett in an article entitled, “A Dark-Skinned Jesus for the Mil-
lennium,” McKenzie’s painting of Jesus is, “A haunting image of a peasant Jesus—dark, thick-lipped, looking out on us with dignity, with sadness but with confidence” (Carroll). A picture of “Jesus of the People” can be seen in appendix B. [Appendix not included here.]

Janet McKenzie agrees with viewers of her work that “Jesus of the People” is the portrayal of Jesus as an African American man, but she hopes that people will see more than just his dark skin when looking at the work. According to McKenzie, “The pink in the painting’s background is both a reference to femininity as well as to the color of blood. The feather symbolizes transcendent knowledge while paying homage to Native American culture and spirituality” (Carroll). It is fitting that viewers would also see a hint of femininity in the figure of Jesus in “Jesus of the People” considering that McKenzie used an African American female model for her depiction of Christ in the work.

McKenzie’s attempts to portray Jesus in the 21st century have won her some praise. “Jesus of the People” was chosen by the National Catholic Reporter, one of the most widely read Catholic publications in the country, as the picture of Christ that donned the cover of its millennium issue. It is clear that McKenzie’s straying from the traditional depictions of Christ as a Caucasian male appeal to the diverse 21st century population in the United States.

It is clear that the North American traditional image of Christ has changed in the 21st century from the traditional depiction of Christ as a tall, lean, long haired, Caucasian male to images more fitting of the culture of the new millennium. Not only has the depiction of Jesus changed in paintings, but it has also been modernized in sculptures and humorous works. Any depiction of Jesus, whether traditional or nontraditional, has significance in the study of general semantics.

**How Depictions of Jesus Relate to General Semantics**

The relationship of portraying Jesus in works of art to the study of general semantics comes in the fact that any portrayal, whether modern or traditional, is an assumption. According to People in Quandaries by Wendell Johnson, “The observations we make are incomplete. They are abstracted from something—from what we have represented in our diagram as the submicroscopic level of inferential data; therefore, we make assumptions” (p.104). From this description of how people make assumptions, it is clear that all portrayals of Jesus are merely inferences as to what He looked like.

The significance of creating images of Christ to the study of general semantics is important in the fact that no evidence of the appearance of Jesus exists in the Bible and there is no scientific evidence of His appearance; there-
fore, every image of Jesus that is created is based on an assumption as to what He looked like. All depictions of Jesus are simply projections of the artist’s perception of Jesus. Everyone who knows Jesus has a mental picture of what He looks like. The important aspect to remember is that how one portrays Jesus is merely an assumption because no evidence of His physical appearance exists.

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NONTRADITIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF JESUS CHRIST AND REACTIONS

(Beth Maryott)

There have been interesting reactions to nontraditional portrayals of Jesus. One of these took place in Union City, New Jersey. The Park Theater Performing Arts Center was about to begin their production of “The Passion Play” and they had chosen an African American actor to play the leading role of Jesus.
The theater thought that they were breaking new ground. Unfortunately there were many people who were very upset by the racial change from the former white actor portraying Jesus. The African American actor began to receive death threats, the theater received harassing phone calls, and it was reported that a patron even called in to the theater shouting that she did not want to see “that black thing.” The theater lost an incredible amount of sales in tickets as many people and groups, including church organizations, began to cancel their ticket orders. This was the first time in the theater’s 82 year history that they had to deal with a racial issue. Interestingly, the African American actor had played other roles in religious performances in the theater in the past. Past roles included Herod, the king who tried to have Jesus killed, and Lucifer. No one seemed to be upset with an African American actor playing these roles. It seems that people can accept an African American in a negative role more easily than in a positive sacred one (“Black Jesus” p.12).

A second startling reaction to a nontraditional portrayal of Jesus Christ occurred in Manhattan in a theater production. The production, “Corpus Christi,” involved a homosexual Jesus Christ. As one can imagine, this production caused a mix of emotions, hatred, and anger. Heated responses evolved as rumors began spreading that it was the story of a homosexual Jesus having sex with the Apostles. This production does involve Jesus having sexual relations with Judas and officiating a homosexual wedding. After the theater began receiving death and bomb threats they had to install metal detectors and hire security guards (“Protesting” p.73).

Another astounding reaction to a nontraditional depiction of Jesus Christ was in a piece of photography. The photographer, Renee Cox, is famous for her use of naked photography. The picture which produced a great deal of grief was titled “Yo Mama’s Last Supper” the picture shows a naked woman at a dinner party. This photo produced by Cox is her interpretation of the Last Supper originally painted by Leonardo da Vinci. Her interpretation includes a depiction of her naked self portraying Jesus Christ surrounded by unclad African American ‘apostles.’ The photo was regarded as anti-Catholic and indecent by former Mayor Giuliani. A major outcry resulting from this piece of photography was the chance of it being shown in a museum supported by tax dollars (Danto 31).

Evaluational rigidity is discussed in People in Quandaries and there is a section in chapter eleven that ties in beautifully with this topic:

…After all, this is a way of saying that the way in which we classify something determines in large measure the way in which we react to it. We classify largely by naming. Having named something, we tend to evaluate it and so to react to it in terms of the name we have given it. We learn in our culture to evaluate
names, or labels, or words, quite independently of the actualities to which they might be applied (Johnson p.261).

WORKS CITED


THE AMERICAN JESUS: A PARADIGM SHIFT
(MEGAN O’BYRNE)

As a nation, America allows its citizens greater religious freedom than any other state. This freedom allows for the development of national religious perceptions different from those found elsewhere. These perceptions lead to the formation of paradigms. In American history there have been two significant paradigm shifts relating to Jesus Christ. The first was in the settling of the nation; and the second was in the 1990s when the WWJD? craze swept the country and brought Jesus home.

Known as “What Would Jesus Do?” or WWJD?, this idea rocked the traditional paradigms. Especially popular among teens, this phenomenon brought Jesus closer to home than ever before. Jesus was more personified in the American culture. He became someone that people could identify with, someone to query about daily life decisions. The paradigm was changing, Jesus was no longer an aloof religious persona, he was a friend. WWJD? paraphernalia began popping up everywhere, bracelets were especially popular but also included were necklaces, book bags, t-shirts, pens, pencils, bible covers, and posters. People began consciously including Jesus in their daily lives, not only by wearing the WWJD? slogan but also by incorporating him into their thoughts and actions. (Beaudoin, 1999, p.1)
While some people, religious and otherwise, welcomed this shift toward Jesus, others found problems with the WWJD? movement. In his article, “A Peculiar Contortion,” Tom Beaudoin pointed out some flaws with the craze. Overall he noted that the image of Jesus has been rather malleable in recent pop culture, Jesus has been appearing regularly in movies, music, and literature. This leads to an over-commercialized perception of spirituality. Jesus and his image are being bought and sold on the open market. The ability to buy and sell Jesus simply debases the legitimacy of the WWJD? movement. Anything that can be so easily marketed and lead to such profits also leads to knock-offs of the product. Beaudoin noted the “What Would Journey Do?” spin linking the movement to an 80s rock band, as well as the “We Want Jack Daniels?” takeoff (Beaudoin, 1999, p.2).

While Beaudoin noted the potential cultural harm of the WWJD? movement, he also took into account the new trend toward religious narrow-mindedness. As WWJD? became the singular religious force in a person’s life, it lead to a reductionistic trend (Beaudoin, 1999, p.2). Individuals would focus so much on wondering what Jesus would do about their daily questions and problems that religion was otherwise left out of their lives. Over-focusing on what exactly Jesus would want for them was potentially harmful to their overall relationship with Christ and reduced their religious life to a single question.

Beaudoin also noted that the WWJD? movement meant different things to different people and religions. While Catholics should not have had a problem with their followers developing a personal relationship with Jesus, they were not overly enthusiastic about the movement. This was largely because a singular question could take the place of two thousand years worth of receptions, reflections, and perceptions of Jesus and try to determine a final, permanent answer to age-old questions. This, to Beaudoin, also reflected upon the American trend of self-worship and individualism (Beaudoin, 1999, p.3).

Across the board, the WWJD? movement did spawn a semantic jump. After four hundred years of American history, Jesus became more popularized, personal, and identifiable in a few short years than ever before. People were able to think of him as a person, a friend, a counselor and confidante more easily and readily than in the past; however, the paradigm shift did not suit all Americans. There were some die-hard Jesus followers that refused to accept the new trend into their lifestyles. Their resistance, however, did not totally dissuade the movement. WWJD? is still visible today and the effects are far-reaching. While some people still prefer to think of Jesus as aloof and commanding, like some early Americans, others have embraced Jesus and his image into their lives as a result of the movement.
Those most affected by the WWJD? movement, the adolescent or Generation X age group, are also the most perplexing age group for religious teachers, preachers, and experts. They “stay away from most churches in droves but love songs about God and Jesus” (Langford, 2000, p.3). While they choose not to actively participate in organized religious activities they identify closely with Jesus on a personal level. At times they seem “almost obsessed with saints, visions, and icons in all shapes and sizes…and post thousands of religious and quasi-religious notes on bulletin boards in cyberspace” (Langford, 2000, p.3). Perhaps this personal change is indicative of a true semantic jump in present-day American society. The paradigm has shifted from one where Jesus is viewed as a religious icon to be worshipped only in a true religious setting to one where individuals can adapt Jesus into their own lifestyles and love him personally. One indicator of this is a Harris Poll conducted in August 2001 which found that Jesus Christ was most often mentioned as a personal hero among participants (Taylor, 2001). The fact that he can be identified as someone that people wish to emulate signifies that he is viewed on a personal level by the population, no longer as a far-away persona.

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A conference on general semantics, especially one titled “Confronting the Challenges of Conflicting World Views,” provides an opportune moment to talk shop about the semantics and ethics of the War in Iraq, with special attention on behaviors of journalists and public relations practitioners and how media critics might improve their criticism and discourse about those issues.

What seems to be going on “in the world out there,” in media-land? What are journalists and PR practitioners up to in their efforts to gather, report, and/or manipulate and package information about the War in Iraq? What trends, if any, can we note in the media-public nexus since 9/11? How can news media practitioners, mere mortals that they are, process and gate-keep information professionally, objectively, and ethically during times of such high international dudgeon, and how can public relations practitioners operate effectively and ethically in the same environment? How do we, as faculty and students and scholars, filter these images and trends through our own systems of values? And then, how do we ethically and responsibly “teach” this stuff, when we ourselves are very likely to be burdened by strong (and perhaps unexamined) prejudices and when we have been granted the awesome power of the classroom lectern?

Let’s explore some of these issues via a case study. The natural laboratory I want to take you to is my Monday night “Ethics Across the Professions” class in late March, 2003. In that course are 45 students, about half from Interdisciplinary Social Sciences and half from Journalism and Media Studies. This week we were concentrating on media ethics; we’ve already worked on ethics of leadership, health care, business, law, and education, and we’ve participated in a three-day international conference on professional ethics. So by now the students are reasonably sophisticated about professional power, codes of ethics, conflicts of interest, the nature of truth telling and harm and independence and accountability, etc. They’re fairly good at systematic moral reasoning, and can
use a variety of ethical decision-making models to think their way through sticky dilemmas. So we should have every reason to expect a discussion of media ethics to proceed at the rational, principled level, right?

Guess again. Not unlike every casual, street-corner, water-cooler, barber-shop conversation any of us have had about media ethics with everyday “ordinary” folks, Monday night’s class quickly degenerated to (or should I say “emerged from”) the visceral level of discourse. The claims and counterclaims constituted what we might call “moralizing,” as distinguished from “moral philosophy.” Such moralizing seems to be informed by prejudice, by selective information, by the syndrome Lewis Carroll described as “‘First the sentence and then the evidence,’ cried the Queen.” In short, it seemed to be a routine discussion about media ethics!

What were the topics brought up, and how were they dealt with? Well, Peter Arnett for one. The NBC/MSNBC/National Geographic reporter stationed in Baghdad, who was interviewed on Iraqi television, had called the US war effort a failure, and was soundly chastised and fired for crossing the Maginot line that separates reporter and activist. Students, citing unnamed sources of rumor (including, of course, the ubiquitous internet) said that Geraldo Rivera had also been kicked out of Iraq for having revealed US troop movements. (Of course, we had not yet seen the Tuesday, April 1, stories in which Geraldo denied he was being removed from the war zone and blamed the rumors on “rats” at NBC news, his former employer, and “the pack of lies” from MSNBC, which he referred to as “so pathetic a cable news network that they have to do everything they can to attract attention.” That would have been grist for the media ethics mill the other night; it will have to wait a week, by which time the world would have learned that Geraldo indeed had been booted out of Iraq for sketching troop movements in the sand.)

On another topic, the students got in a tizzy over front page photos of a downed US helicopter on one day and of American prisoners of war on another last week. This was seen by some as the liberal media’s bias against the war effort. (Some did note that after a flurry of jingoistic letters to the editor opposing such coverage, the liberal but not commercially insensitive St. Petersburg Times atoned for its “error” by splashing a huge page one photo of a GI carrying a wounded Iraqi soldier one day, and, the next day, a US military doctor cradling an Iraqi infant. Some seemed to think that was a blatant sell-out on the part of the paper. Others thought it was just common sense.) But those photos of the American prisoners of war, and especially the Al-Jazeera’s gruesome footage of US casualties, raised the most ire. How could any international media be so insensitive, and how could any domestic media report on casualties before knowing whether the families of American soldiers had been notified?
And then, when families had been notified, why would any responsible journalists shove cameras in their face? Have these people no sense of decency, or privacy?

Another topic the students argued about: Embedded journalists—reporters and photographers riding along with, protected by, and inevitably allied with US troops. They give us great insights to the war, insights lacking in the military-controlled Persian Gulf War of a decade ago, said some of the students. (Some were particularly excited about the incredible new portable technology that brings the war home to us instantaneously in living color, but not everyone saw this as serving society in any meaningful way.) Others countered with claims that there’s no way a journalist this beholden to anyone for food, clothing, shelter, transportation, safety, and a daily ration of news could do anything other than lose professional objectivity and reflect a sort of “Journalistic Stockholm Syndrome.” The Pentagon has created as much control over this decade’s press as it did in 1991, but is a lot smarter about how it controls us, some of the students said. (As you might suspect, the students majoring in journalism and those majoring in public relations did not see eye to eye on this.)

Speaking of the loss of objectivity and the PR “machine,” it was noted that liberals opposed to the war are angry not just at President Bush, but also at the news media; they say the media have not been aggressive enough in challenging the bellicose agenda of Bush, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft, and Company. And they note that conservative radio talk show hosts and Rupert Murdoch’s FOX network are leading the jingoistic rallies in support of the war, drowning out any opposition media. The discussion spontaneously back-pedaled to 9/11, with the attendant concerns about journalists’ patriotism or lack thereof, of flag-waving and sloganeering, of creating and blindly deferring to mass hysteria, anti-Middle East prejudice, and then nationalistic group think—topics that inevitably stir the loins.

And so it went. A class of rational thinkers regressed to visceral and anecdotal discourse.

Is anything wrong with this picture? Should we expect more of our students-cum-citizens, or of our media practitioners-in-waiting, of our ethics students?

We might accuse them of being knuckle-dragging, mouth-breathing, moral troglodytes (I have to thank one of my students for coining this phrase). But that would be shortsighted and unfair, and make us vulnerable to accusations that we’re pointy-headed liberal professors. Rather, I believe the students’ passion speaks to the importance of understanding media in the political/economic/societal matrix, and the significance (and concomitant difficulty) of grappling
with media ethics vis-à-vis general social ethics and applied professional ethics and values.

In retrospect it seems to me that my students, in their animated discussion, were engaging in some essential components of learning and doing ethics. Indeed, they all seemed to be reflecting at least two, if not four, of the five course objectives listed on my syllabus. (The syllabus draws from the Hastings Center, Institute of Society, Ethics, and Life Science, which listed five instructional goals appropriate to any ethics course.) At the very least, the discussion revealed the 1) recognition of moral issues and the 2) stimulation of the moral imagination. For some students, the discussion also seemed to 3) elicit a sense of moral obligation and personal responsibility; occasionally, there was evidence of 4) tolerating and resisting disagreement and moral ambiguity.

The fifth objective, the development of analytical skills for the systematic evaluation of moral dilemmas, had been the focus of much of the semester’s early work. Ironically (or was it so ironic?), the viscerally engaging subject du jour seemed to result in the students’ bypassing the rigorous logic of objective decision-making while they were engaged in recognizing issues/stimulating moral imagination/eliciting a sense of moral obligation/tolerating moral ambiguity.

My job, as a strong believer in the “teachable moment,” was to devote class time to help them momentarily pull back from the heat of the debate and systematically work through some of the issues and dilemmas—to bring light to the heat. In reality, all we could get to this week were a couple of the dilemmas. It could take a whole semester just to untangle the issues the class raised, but that’s the fun of teaching ethics: We do have an entire semester, in an intellectually safe and nurturing classroom, to do our thinking and caring, to learn how to front-load our decisions so that once we do get out there in the “real world” we’re armed and ready to think and act as moral agents. (Maybe that’s one benefit the “academic perspective” offers that is not likely to arise from the disconnected snippets, war stories, and moralizing expressed by many of the professionals/practitioners who speak to our classes and to the world at large via their mass media. That academic perspective forces us to transcend—or at least temporarily postpone—prejudice.)

How did I help my students do the necessary work, and how does what I did with them relate to broader questions of media ethics, values, and semantics?

For one thing, we did some meta-analysis, by noting the need to bear in mind the values, principles, loyalties, professional roles, stages of moral development—and the necessity of having enough information to make informed decisions—reflected throughout our processing of the cases. Each variable can
be applied to almost any case study; collectively, they constitute lenses needed to “do ethics” thoroughly and effectively.

Then I shared with them the 1996 code of ethics of the world’s largest organization of journalists, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), and had them frame their discussion in accordance with its four fundamental principles of journalistic practice: 1) to seek truth and to report it; 2) to minimize harm; 3) to act independently; and 4) to be accountable. We looked at each in turn, noting that in seeking truth and reporting it journalists attempt to be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, interpreting, and distributing information; that in minimizing harm ethical journalists try to treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings inherently deserving of respect; that in acting independently journalists try to be free of obligation to any interest other than the public’s right to know, and that in being accountable journalists are responsive to legitimate moral claims made by their readers, listeners, viewers, and each other.

We quickly pointed out that the four guiding principles are intended to work in tandem rather than in isolation, that any given ethical dilemma probably entails a balancing act between or among two or more of the principles in a sort of “right versus right” configuration. (We’re obligated to Rushworth Kidder’s highly readable text, How Good People Make Tough Choices, for the “right versus right” paradigm.) How much truth can and should be sought, and how much harm permitted to occur? How much independence can or should journalists have, and how accountable (and to whom) should they be?

Consider what happens when we polarize the constructs. We end up visualizing the journalistic enterprise as either a search for truth or an avoidance of harm, or as either unbridled independence or absolute accountability. In doing so we end up in a mental bind wherein we think we have to tell the raw truth at all costs, even if it means the invasion of someone’s privacy; or, vice versa, that we have to avoid inflicting any discomfort or harm even if it means important truths go untold; meanwhile, we either operate as though the First Amendment guarantees us total independence from government and all other institutions and individual power brokers [a naive interpretation, one too often unexamined in media circles], so we should not hold ourselves accountable nor permit anyone else to do so; or, vice versa, we are so conscious of being accountable to any and all that we lose needed autonomy and the capacity for independent thinking. Such are the consequences of polarizing SPJ’s four guiding principles.
As some of you may already know, I live in France, more precisely in Paris. My purpose here is to give you an account of the possible reasons explaining the French reaction to the US move in Iraq, and see if there is a way to avoid past traps and mutual misunderstanding between these two nations.

To start off, I would like to make clear at this point that my favorite tool for understanding current events and international relations is History with a capital H. Quite often, but of course not always necessarily, international relations follow past schemas. These schemas are sometimes made rather explicit but can also be underlying or ignored. Moreover, even explicit reasons can often cover more complex issues that take several years to come to the surface.

Peoples, families, etc., also seem to need myths to account for their past. Myths are more often than not distorted accounts of the past. History, on the contrary, should be as close to real events as possible. It is sometimes difficult to tell myths and History apart. Therefore, it is important to understand both the myths and the history peoples and nations carry through to understand them. Therefore, I will try to be as fair as one can be regarding my interpretation of present French-American relations from a historical viewpoint. But at the same time, in case I am being mistaken, I wish you to follow my presentation as you would a fiction or a tale!

France & Religion

France witnessed the wars of religion during the 16th century. These wars created troubles apart from the human damages they brought about. King Henry the Fourth restored peace in the kingdom. Consequently the French separation between the Church and the State takes its roots in the wars of religion, as Henry the Fourth allowed for the people to unite themselves under one state, moving religions out. (1)

With the fall of the French monarchy and the rise of the French Republic through the 18th and the 19th centuries, the separation between the Catholic
Church and the State became final and was reinforced in 1905. For instance, schools became fully secular.

Today there is a clear-cut separation between one’s religious beliefs and one’s public actions. For instance, when a French citizen fills out a form to enter the US, he or she probably does not understand the following question: Which religion do you have/hold? This question does not make sense for a French citizen. To him or her, religion belongs to the private sphere only. Thus French politicians, if they go to church on Sundays, will never make any publicity around it. Altogether, to illustrate this point, the French do not take oaths on the Bible.

Therefore you can imagine that any biblical reference made by a politician does not make sense to French people. With this element in mind you can understand why religious references like ‘Empire of Evil’ or ‘Evil Axis’ do not make sense in France, or seem misplaced. The literal translation of these expressions into French cannot convey the meanings they have in English and creates confusion.

French has a word for the separation between the Church and the State in everyday life: *laïcité*, adjective: *laïc*. How do you translate it in English? You can say ‘secularity’ or ‘secularization’ and still will not carry all the meanings that ‘laïcité’ brings out. Altogether, it is quite impossible for me to translate ‘sects’ or ‘denominations’ in French!

It should be noted that ‘*laïcité*’ is different from the secularization process former communist countries followed. Religions are not forbidden, they just simply belong to the individual and private sphere only.

What is the consequence of the French ‘*laïcité*’ on international relations? The French tend to hold better relationships and ties with other secular states where religions can be a matter of discord. In short, the French distrust administrations based on religious grounds.

This is very important to understand French relationships with Iraq. To the French eye, Saddam Hussein was a ‘*laïc*’, secular leader. Thus Saddam Hussein’s regime has not always been perceived by France as dangerous as other regimes existing in the middle-east.

**NOTE**

1. He is famous for the motto “Paris is worth a mass.”
The talk below was accompanied by a multimedia presentation.

CONFRONTING THE
CHALLENGES OF CONFLICTING
WORLD VIEWS

LAURA BERTONE

Confronting the challenges of conflicting world views is, perhaps, one of the challenges many of us had to face as infants: the sometimes conflicting world views of mother and father and of their families: different aims and ambitions in life, different ways to conceive progress or face problems, different attitudes towards nature, people, money, different religions, or attitudes towards the same faith, different styles, different rhythms, different tastes. So, I will not take the international approach but the very basic one most of us underwent at home. And those who did not feel the conflict at home must surely have felt it either in the wider circle of family and friends, or in the still wider circle of acquaintances, colleagues at work, or people at large in other regions, other countries, or even their own.

I could take the example of my own family, but I will, instead, take the example of my own country, which for reasons we will not explore in detail, represents a unique case of study, since it is to the best of our knowledge the only country in the 20th century to have gone through a process of development (ranked 7th in 1900), of having come to a halt and started a deep process of underdevelopment without having been at war. How to explain such a reversal?

Several years ago, and long before the last and most terrible crisis of December 2001 started, I said at the general semantics conference at Hofstra University in New York that Argentina was the best example I knew of non-general semantics at work. Events have unfortunately proven me right, and you may have witnessed some scenes of deep poverty and violent riots some time ago on your television screens.

Here I would like to show part of a multimedia to visually offer some data about Argentina and the present crisis with emphasis on some of the “cultural aspects” (or non-GS mechanisms) that might have led to the present terminal
crisis, such as the “either-or” mentality, stereotyping, identification, allness, “double binds,” etc.

The violence of this crisis, with the abnormal child mortality rate (due to malnutrition) for a country famous for the richness of its soil, made many Argentines finally(!) react. And there began to appear some positive signs: incredible increase in solidarity rates, in people’s participation and involvement in community affairs, etc. Some of the good signs the argentine society showed in the last twelve months are timidly showing our need to build bridges, to change some of our thinking patterns, to change our maps of the world.

To favor and strengthen these courses of action, we provided from EVOLUCION some seminars along the year 2002 which we called “Tools for a New Society” (mostly based on general semantics formulations). It is from these experiences that we will draw the material for a multimedia specially devised for the Las Vegas Conference, which we may call “Basic Kit of Thinking Organizers.” (They imply a different view on language skills—different for traditional linguists, not for general semanticists, useful for any language, culture or creed. These tools are based on GS formulations or are themselves GS formulations. For pedagogical reasons, options can be made that might be criticized from a strict GS perspective, but those aspects interesting from the academic or the research viewpoint will be purposefully left aside with the intent of reaching people at large.)

We believe that the big challenge of how to deal with conflicting world views, starting at home, can have the beginning of an answer through a more conscious use of everyday language and patterns of thought.

One Bigger Challenge, though, is that it is not only “me” who should become more conscious but also “you,” for the positive interaction to take place and make life possible, even with opposing world views; it is not only “us” who should become more aware of how human nature can deal with things and with itself but also “the others” who should become aware, so as to reach reasonable and trustworthy types of relationships. So, a giant step should be made by each one of us for very slow collective tiny results at the beginning ... in the hope that eventually, more and more people will get involved in the process.

There are certain traps to avoid here: despair, cynicism or laissez-faire, before the disproportion between the amount of necessary efforts and energy and the scarcity and paucity of the first results... The big challenge is to accept to take action—even if the effort seems like a drop in the ocean—and sustain the effort against all odds.

As French crisis management expert, Patrick Lagadec, states after 30 years of action and research: positive upheavals are also possible.
My belief today is that we should start where we can, with those easier
to reach because we seem to be running out of time. Ideally, we should act at
different levels at the same time, starting with people at the top of public and
private functions and roles, but we should simultaneously attempt to reach as
many people as possible out of the millions that are out there. We consequently
need, from my perspective, both a mix of audio-visual and multimedia tech-
niques, and a mix of genres: education and entertainment, sports and arts.

This is my humble contribution, starting in all modesty from the very nar-
row and distant space I occupy.

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THE LANGUAGE OF CHANGE:
General-Semantics and Malcolm
Gladwell’s “The Tipping Point”

DAXTON R. “CHIP” STEWART

“You cannot step into the same river twice; for other
and yet other waters are ever flowing on.”
—Heraclitus, c. 500 B.C.

To Wendell Johnson, Heraclitus was 2,000 years ahead of his time. Johnson,
a general semantics scholar, emphasized the fluid nature of reality and stressed
the importance of the way people handle change. “No other fact so unrelen-
tingly shapes and reshapess our lives as this: that reality, in the broadest sense,
continually changes, like the river of Heraclitus,” he wrote. “But change, how-
ever all-pervading and rapid, need not be terrifying.” (1)

And yet change, in many situations, can be both frightening and difficult to
understand. How people deal with change has been the subject of many au-
thors, ranging from philosophers and social scientists to popular psychologists.
The bases of these works are the same: change is inevitable, so people must
learn how to adapt. But exactly how people have adapted in the past, and how
they could do a better job of adapting in the future, is open to the broadest
interpretations, and the widest use of language. Thomas Kuhn, one of the most
widely recognized philosophers of change, used some of the political language
of “revolution” to frame the shifting paradigms of scientific change and rethink the scientific method in his masterpiece *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

(2) General semanticists suggest that change, like any other situation, should be handled rationally and scientifically. Johnson urged that people should see reality as a process and be ready to adapt to our ever-changing world. People must subject “(t)he Word to the test of experience and to revis(e) it accordingly, no matter how old The Word may be or who defends it,” he wrote. (3)

But in spite of science, society often shows a resistance to change. S. I. Hayakawa called this a “cultural lag,” which can be caused by many factors, including ignorance and fear. (4) These make humans’ ability to adapt to an ever-changing world a struggle. Viewing such changes through the lens of general semantics, though, makes it easier for people to avoid two-valued debate and the status quo and come to a new understanding of things that more accurately reflects the changing world around them. (5)

Those who study change are drawing maps to make it easier to navigate the past and possible future of our understanding of change. But those maps aren’t the territory—change may not be so easy to understand, and the symbols, metaphors and abstractions used by those who set out to explain change are certain to alter the way people view changes in their own world.

In modern business, change has proven to be a best-selling topic. But how can authors writing about change, applicable to both business and personal life, avoid easily falling into the traps that general semantics would have them avoid? For one recent best-selling book—*The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell—the time is ripe for a general-semantics analysis.

**Origins of The Tipping Point**

Gladwell, now a staff writer for *The New Yorker* after years of business and science reporting for *The Washington Post*, was a freelance writer when he came across the basis for *The Tipping Point* in 1996. In an article Gladwell wrote that ran in *The New Yorker* that year, also entitled “The Tipping Point,” he tackled the issue of what it was that caused a dramatic drop in crime rates in New York City in the mid-1990s. (6)

Gladwell suggested a new way of thinking about crime that “has begun to attract serious attention in the social sciences: the idea that social problems behave like infectious agents and “move through populations like the flu.” (7) He used the language of epidemiology, studying the patterns of a flu outbreak during Christmas time in Manhattan and the growth of AIDS in the United
States since the late 1980s. “Every epidemic has its tipping point, and to fight an epidemic you need to understand what that point is.” (8)

But Gladwell notes that epidemics don’t necessarily follow common sense; they don’t behave how we think they will behave. “Epidemics aren’t linear,” he wrote, noting that humans prefer to think in linear terms. “Improvement does not correspond directly to effort. All that matters is the tipping point.” (9) As such, small changes can have big effects—“it all depends on when and how the changes are made.” (10)

Social scientists, Gladwell writes, were beginning to apply the framework of epidemiology to human behavior—a view that social problems are contagious. He makes it clear that the analogy isn’t perfect, that “not all crime behaves like infectious disease.” But in the proper context, he argues, the analogy is useful. (11) For example, in New York, the North Brooklyn and Seventy-fifth Precinct, law enforcement had begun focusing on smaller, quality-of-life crimes (street corner loitering, stopping more cars, confiscating more weapons) rather than trying to wage open war against homicide. The changes were minor and non-linear, but they apparently worked. Violent crime had “tipped” and was happening dramatically less often. To Gladwell, these police departments had found “the tipping point.” (12)

The article helped to establish Gladwell’s reputation as one of the most respected magazine writers in the profession and led to much greater things for his career. (13) While writing for The New Yorker and Talk, Gladwell continued research on the idea of tipping points.

**How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference**

In 2000, *The Tipping Point* was published, with the subtitle “How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference.” It quickly became noticed in the business community, and by the end of the year it was a “Notable Book” selection in The New York Times as well as a hardback best-seller. More importantly for its success, though, was that it became a business bible; “the tipping point” became a catchphrase used by leaders of industry and culture—including former President Bill Clinton, who used the phrase at a White House press conference in 2000. (14) The book has caught on as a learning tool in much the same way Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* did; at The University of Texas, for example, *The Tipping Point* is required reading among first-year Composition and Rhetoric students. (15)

But in the book, Gladwell goes further than just illustrating how trends in the past have “tipped.” He uses his epidemic theory to create a framework that can be used to try to make social change happen in the future: his goal is to
provide a self-help guide for those who want to make something “tip.” It is this aspect that has made it one of the most popular business books on the market; since coming out in paperback in 2002, The Tipping Point spent more than five months on The New York Times nonfiction best-seller list, and has remained on the Business Week’s paperback best-seller list for business books for close to two years.

The book and the phrase have also been widely used to explain social and political events. U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld used “the tipping point” to describe the time at which the Iraqis would realize that Saddam Hussein’s reign had come to an end. (16) British House of Lords member Tim Bell used The Tipping Point to create new direction for Tory leadership and a strategy to oust Prime Minister Tony Blair in a popular election. (17) An article in Sports Illustrated used Gladwell’s idea of influential people (connectors, mavens and salesmen) to explain how Pete Carril’s offense spread to college programs across the nation that were looking for a way to slow down games and handle more talented opponents from larger schools. (18) Even researchers used the phrase. At Kansas State University, two researchers used the concept of influential people to find out if such people on the Kansas State campus were playing a role in the drinking habits of their peers. They identified 55 such students through what they called a “tipping point experiment” in which students were polled about students who have extraordinary “verbal skills and charisma.” (19)

Using general semantics as a framework, the next section examines the book’s fundamental premise—that social change follows the patterns of epidemics—as well as the personal and contextual support that Gladwell provides for that premise.

Social Change as Epidemic

Gladwell’s premise is a use of simile and metaphor on a grand scale. When he writes, “Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do,” (20) he is merely using a simile. Social change is not a virus, of course; it just seems to act like one.

In general semantics, writing with metaphor and simile are accepted ways of abstracting. As Hayakawa noted, objecting to statements on the grounds that they are “based on metaphor or on ‘metaphorical thinking’ is rarely just. The question is not whether metaphors are used, but whether the metaphors represent useful similarities.” (21) Metaphor and simile are powerful uses of affective language, and may eliminate the need for new words and phrases to describe a new situation. (22)
But metaphor and simile may be abused, and should be used with care when writing about culture. “Far more than we are aware, the way we use language determines what the social philosophy of our society will be,” wrote general semantics scholar Weller Embler. “When we take figurative language literally, we are in danger of behaving as if something were true which is manifestly not true unless we proceed to make it so.” (23)

Furthermore, using the language of disease as a metaphor comes with its own problems. Susan Sontag, in her essay “Illness as Metaphor,” suggested that people have too often used disease (particularly cancer and tuberculosis) as metaphors for other things, from art and literature to politics. (24) Sontag concluded that “modern disease metaphors are all cheap shots…Only in the most limited sense is any historical event or problem like an illness.” (25)

Gladwell certainly pushes the limits of the change-as-epidemic metaphor. At one point, to explain the role of context and the “stickiness” of a particular message, he uses a “well-known principle of virology” that sometimes epidemic agents are transformed, making them more dangerous (or, in terms of positive change, more likely to “stick” with the intended recipient). (26) Messengers are seen as people who “infect” others with the message. (27)

Gladwell acknowledges that the metaphor is not perfect; “the problems and situations we face don’t always embody the principles of epidemics so neatly.” (28) Though he makes a number of valid points using the epidemic-as-change metaphor, he takes it far too literally, thus pinning him (and his readers) within a narrow framework from which to view how to make change happen. Gladwell too easily ignores the general semantic notion of “non-allness”—“All epidemics have tipping points,” he writes (29)—to make his metaphor far more literal than Hayakawa or Sontag would advise.

**People Who Make Things “Tip”**

If social change is like an epidemic, then one of the ways to make an epidemic “tip” lies with the people who carry it—in Gladwell’s words, “the people who transmit infectious agents.” Gladwell calls the carriers of social epidemics “messengers,” (30) and in his examples he comes up with three particular types of messengers: Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen. They are the ones who are the most sociable, knowledgeable and influential among their peers, respectively. (31) Gladwell’s interpretation of connectors, mavens and salesmen—and the role they play in change—shapes the way he describes change.

Connectors, mavens and salesmen are some of Gladwell’s examples of how small things can make a big difference. It is these few people, he argues, that make things “tip.” Gladwell’s notion is that mass advertising may miss the
point, because word of mouth is “still the most important form of human communication.” (32) And connectors, mavens and salesmen are crucial to making a word-of-mouth epidemic tip.

Gladwell causes some confusion by drawing these neat categorizations and then saying that a person can be all of the above, some combination of the above, or none of the above. Paul Revere, who Gladwell says was in charge of the most famous word-of-mouth epidemic in history, was a combination of connector, maven and salesman. (33) While he insists that you must have all three to make a word-of-mouth epidemic “tip,” all three can be contained in just one person. Or at least two people—he says mavens aren’t persuaders, which means mavens may not be good salesmen. The way he identifies people is problematic considering the principles of non-identity and non-elementalism. He explains the three roles as fragmented characters, when really any one person may contain parts of all three, or may be well-connected, knowledgeable and influential enough without qualifying under Gladwell’s definition of connector, maven or salesman. (34) He is certainly aware of the problems non-identity pose—in a later chapter, he writes of how we understand character traits: “All of us, when it comes to personality, naturally think in terms of absolutes: that a person is a certain way or is not a certain way…But what (researchers) are suggesting is that this is a mistake.” (35) Unfortunately, in the context of connectors, mavens and salesmen, Gladwell makes the same mistake.

He also goes too far when he suggests that any word-of-mouth movement is doomed to fail without these few people. “No one else matters,” he writes. (36) The examples he gives—such as a woman seeking to teach black women in San Diego about breast cancer fails when trying to teach after church, but succeeds when she instead goes to beauty salons (recognizing hairdressers as the connectors and mavens of the culture) (37)—merely illustrate his points rather than establish their truth.

How Circumstances Affect Change

Gladwell includes two other rules besides “The Law of the Few,” and it is in these rules that he shows a keen awareness of some of the principles of general semantics, which is concerned with what makes messages work and how context shapes the way we understand those messages.

“Stickiness,” as Gladwell calls it, is the factor that makes a social epidemic take hold—that makes us remember it and act upon it. As such, effective messages require more than just the proper messengers. “(T)he content of the message matters too. And the specific quality that a message needs to be successful is the quality of ‘stickiness.’” (38) Stickiness relies on more than just informa-
tive use of language; sticky messages are often directive, and are at the heart of modern advertising. For example, Gladwell explains the effectiveness of the Winston cigarette ad. “To this day, if you say to most Americans, ‘Winston tastes good,’ they can finish the phrase, ‘like a cigarette should.’ That’s a classically sticky advertising line.” (39) All it took was a simple grammatical error and a rhyme to make that message stick.

One example Gladwell gives is of how children’s television made education “sticky” through the shows *Sesame Street* and, more recently, *Blue’s Clues*. The tweaks in the way information was presented in those shows were minor—having interaction between human characters and muppets rather than dividing them in *Sesame Street*, or reordering the three clues in *Blue’s Clues* to better build suspense and keep the kids’ attention. But even though Gladwell suggests that it only takes a small change to make a message “sticky,” he makes it clear that finding that small change can require hours of work and research. Social scientists and other researchers have been deeply involved in testing shows and scenes from both *Sesame Street* and *Blue’s Clues*. (40) The rational, scientific approach—research, rethink and revise—is what led to the small changes.

In addition to effective message-sending, general semantics focuses on the role of context in our understanding of messages. Gladwell also expresses awareness of the importance, the “power,” of context—it is his third rule of tipping points. “Epidemics are sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which they occur,” he writes. “(W)e are more than just sensitive to changes in context. We’re exquisitely sensitive to them.” (41) He focuses on two types of context: temporal/spacial context, and social context.

The “Environmental Tipping Point” is just one example Gladwell gives of the power of context. The other is the social context—or as Gladwell phrases it, the “power of one specific aspect of context, which is the critical role that groups play in social epidemics.” (42) His example is of small book clubs and the role they played in turning Rebecca Wells’ *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* into a publishing sensation created almost solely by word of mouth. The comparisons he makes are to types of people who are not necessarily connectors, mavens or salesmen, but organizers. “Methodism’s founder, John Wesley, was by no means the most charismatic preacher of his era,” Gladwell illustrates. “Nor was Wesley a great theologian, in the tradition of, say, John Calvin or Martin Luther. His genius was organizational.” (43) Gladwell says the tipping point for Methodism—as well as the Ya-Ya book clubs—was this sense of community. (44)

Unfortunately for Gladwell, it is here where the change-as-epidemic metaphor again shows some weakness. In real disease, epidemics are not started by a bunch of small movements. Gladwell inexplicably refers to this as “the para-
dox of the epidemic: that in order to create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first.” (45)

Conclusion

The idea that little things can make a big difference is an alluring one. People want to think that there is an easier, more cost-efficient and time-efficient way to make things change. Even some general semanticists embrace the idea. Edward T. Hall said change on a technical level, small changes that can work their way up to formal understanding, can happen quicker and are especially concerned with details. “Here one can introduce changes with the greatest ease without violating the norms of the other two systems.” (46) These are usually small changes—changes to details. Hall gives the example of the Manus islanders, which have a technical view of culture. With modernization and outside contact with the West following World War II, the Manus technically recreated their society. “They didn’t wait for change to overtake them gradually, or drift off in small numbers and lose themselves among the whites. They sat down and designed a society from the ground up.” (47) In The Tipping Point, Gladwell suggests a similar model for modern culture and business. By focusing on little details, people can anticipate and create culture change. They can make a social epidemic “tip.”

But change isn’t always that easy, no matter how much Gladwell would argue that it is. (48) If we understand reality as a process and see the world as an ever-changing mosaic of understanding and interaction, it should be clear that change cannot be pigeonholed into any formal rules or patterns. It is easy to reflect on past change and to make some abstractions about how they happened. It is much more difficult to make society change based on how change has observably happened in the past.

Gladwell is clearly one of the best writers in America today, and he does a superb job of gathering examples and weaving narratives from what others may see as dry scientific reports and essays by social scientists. He has a tremendous gift for affective writing and for persuading, even if his logic isn’t always completely sound. One of the greatest traps into which he regularly falls is simplifying cause-and-effect connections. “The word about Ya-Ya was spreading…from reading group to reading group, from Ya-Ya group to Ya-Ya group and from one of Wells’s readings to another, because for over a year she stopped everything else and toured the country non-stop.” (49) he writes, ignoring other outside factors, especially publicity such as advertising and critical reviews. Change is not that simple.
But Gladwell wants to write a book that simplifies the way we view change. Though he uses wonderful examples, they can’t possibly tell the whole story. As Wendell Johnson noted, “On the whole, once we have adopted a belief, we give particular attention to cases that seem to support it, we distort other cases in order to make them support it, and we ignore or belittle other cases.” (50) When Gladwell makes The Tipping Point fit every example he gives, he makes it seem applicable to everything, when it clearly isn’t. One critic noted, “Gladwell’s book breezily applied the concept to just about everything, with special focus on problems in sales, marketing, advertising, and brand loyalty.” (51) Another critic wrote that it is hard for the readers to “notice the details he is leaving out.” (52) The process of leaving some things out—of abstraction—is of critical interest to general semanticists. There is surely much more to social change than Gladwell can ever explain in 250 pages. The choices he makes, and the abstractions he makes, shape the way he presents his argument. We only see what he wants us to see.

Gladwell, as a journalist, has been extremely influential in business and in society with his articles and now with his best-selling book. Using his own words, he has become a connector, a maven and a salesman for his idea of “tipping points,” which have taken hold as a popular notion of how change happens. But under the light of scrutiny from general semantics, it becomes clear that Gladwell may have some good advice for us, but it is to be taken with the usual grain of salt.

Etc.

REFERENCES


5. Id. at 205-207.
7. Id. at 2-3.
8. Id. at 3.
9. Id. at 4.
10. Id.
11. Id. at 7.
12. Id. at 8.
15. Confirmed by Madison Searle, a friend and instructor in the Division of Composition and Rhetoric at The University of Texas-Austin.
22. Id. at 79.
25. Id. at 82.
27. Id. at 166.
28. Id. at 195.
29. Id. at 12.
30. Id. at 92.
31. Id. at 21.
32. Id. at 32.
33. Id. at 32.

34. People may very well be “innovators” (which may also be a maven, connector or salesman) or “translators,” other categories Gladwell creates for people who play roles in social change. Id. at 199-200.

35. Id. at 158.
36. Id. at 256.

37. This apparently worked—the stylists were coached on issues about breast cancer and tried to work it into their discussions. But did this somehow turn them into salesmen? Id. at 254-255.

38. Id. at 92.
39. Id. at 25.
40. Id. at 91-132.
41. Id. at 139-140.
42. Id. at 171.
43. Id. at 172.
44. Id. at 172-173.
45. Id. at 192.

47. Id. at 84-85.

48. Gladwell refers to his notion of “focused, targeted interventions” as agents of change as a “Band-Aid” solution, but in a positive way. “The Band-Aid is an inexpensive, convenient, and remarkably versatile solution to an astonishing array of problems…The Band-Aid solution is actually the best kind of solution because it involves solving a problem with the minimum amount of effort and time and cost.” Id. at 256.

49. Id. at 174.
50. Johnson at 26-27.
REPLACING OUR PATTERN OF UNIVERSAL DISCORD

C. A. HILGARTNER

Abstract

Throughout his lifespan, Korzybski worked to un-conceal the underlying assumptions of the “civilization” of his day and to test them against his multilingual experiencing. Eventually he showed that the logical construct of identity, which he glossed as “absolute sameness in all respects,” forms the basis of many of the problems he saw; and he proposed that we regard it as never valid, untenable, and cease relying on it as a fundamental postulate. Unfortunately, Korzybski neither told nor showed us how to do that.

I pick up where Korzybski left off. I found a previously unsuspected usage of identity in the Western Indo-European (WIE) grammar which leads to life-endangering survival-errors. WIE language-users who do not understand these issues behave as though the world exists as a complex of isolated systems; act as though possessed of “absolute certainty”; and fail to detect their errors. While working to eliminate these errors from my own symbolizing, I have revised WIE mathematical, physical, biological, and psycho-social theories, among others.
INTRAPERSONAL EVOLUTION: 
A SHARING OF SEMANTIC JUMPS

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An article, written by the proposer of this program, entitled “Intrapersonal Evolution: The Structured Unconscious, The Structural More, and the Semantic Jump,” was published in the Fall 1994 issue of ETC. The article presented the concept of interpersonal evolution occurring through a series of semantic jumps. It explained individual interpersonal evolution as a process involving the individual’s structured unconscious, the addition of the structural more, and a resulting semantic jump.

This proposal is for a program of sharing among the audience. It is proposed that the program begin with an explanation of the concept of intrapersonal evolution followed by a sharing among the participants of their personal semantic jumps. The semantic jump can be seen as an internal revolution, a restructuring of reality, a radical, irreversible change in an individual’s structural system affecting the individual’s human information processing system. Any major change in one’s life results in the addition of a structural more which, if significant, results in a radical change in the cognitive structuring of incoming information and modifies one’s outlook on life.

Members of the audience will be invited to share their semantic jumps and the resulting changes in individual perceptions. Understanding the concept of semantic jumping allows one to move to an awareness of the world and oneself as interacting swirls of restless processes.
CHANGING REPUTATIONS:  
Demarginalizing General Semantics

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Abstract

This paper explores some of the possible reasons for the marginalization of GS. After describing the unique location of general semantics among disciplines, it briefly examines the critique of GS by Martin Gardner, one of its main skeptical opponents. In my view, a close look at Gardner’s writings on GS will explain some of the current confusion about and neglect of GS by the educated public and various academic communities. A look at the work of Korzybski’s students S. I. Hayakawa and Anatol Rapoport also provides some insight into misinterpretations of GS. The presentation concludes with an exhortation for bridging the gaps between ‘the GS world’ and academics, scientists, philosophers, skeptics, and T. C. Mits and T. C. Wits (The Celebrated Man and Woman in the street).
SOME THOUGHTS ON THE WWJD? (WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?) BRACELET

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Dr. Gateley died shortly after he submitted this paper and after he accepted our invitation to present it at the Conference. This paper first appeared as an article in ETC: A Review of General Semantics, vol. 57 no. 3, Fall 2000.

Throughout the country, there are thousands of people, including unknown numbers of children, who wear a small bracelet inscribed with, WWJD? (“What Would Jesus Do?”). I became aware of this when my grandson wore one of these home from elementary school. He was quite proud of it, and told me that one of his classmates had given it to him. I asked him how he would use his, and he said wasn’t certain. He thought he was to ask himself this question when he wanted to do something, and do what Jesus would do, a responsive demamap (MacNeal, 1998). When I asked him how he would know what Jesus would do, he said he didn’t know, and turned on the cartoons.

I did not trouble him with the questions, “What would Jesus do about what?” “When would he do this?” and “How would he do it?” because I did not want my grandson to suspect my sanity, a fate that often befalls general semanticists.

I have no objections to people wearing the bracelet, if it helps them become happier and more productive, but suppose you adopted the philosophy implied by the question the bracelet asks and attempted to use it as a responsive demamap (MacNeal, 1999): How would you answer the question?

To be specific: What would Jesus do if He were a female, age 16 years, who was pregnant as a result of rape? What would He do if He were a child, age 6 years, and was a victim of sexual abuse? What would Jesus do if He were a black person repeatedly abused because of his race? What would Jesus do if he were a gay high-school student? Neil Postman said that he would be interested in what Jesus would have to say about human cloning (Postman, p.12), and I
share that interest. You, no doubt, can think of some other questions that reflect actual conditions.

You might try to find the answer by reading the *New Testament*, but there are some major problems presented by this approach. We do not *know* that Jesus made any of the statements attributed to Him, but suppose the accounts are accurate and that He uttered every word the writers of the *New Testament* attributed to Him. He did not often explain His messages, and when He did explain them, as He did when He interpreted some of His parables to His disciples, readers may not understand the explanations.

I continued to ponder the matter, wondering about the thinking of the thousands of people who undoubtedly believe that the question on the bracelet is an important question that can be answered with some certainty. I thought about it some more when I learned that the two leading candidates for President of the United States share the philosophy implied by the bracelet. Mr. Bush declares that the most influential person in his life is Jesus Christ, and Mr. Gore has said that he is a “Born-again Christian” (Is there any other kind?) and stated that when he is faced with a decision, asks himself, “What would Jesus do?”

The statements of Mr. Bush and Mr. Gore make me quite nervous, because Jesus was prone to lose his temper at times and was not above taking the law into his own hands. Once, He became angry at a fig tree and cursed it for having no figs on it, even though it was not the season for figs (Matthew 11:12-14). When He disapproved of what people were doing in the temple, He went inside it, and, using a whip He had platted for the purpose, drove them outside (John 2:13-16). Are these good examples for children? Is there a hidden, deeper meaning in these passages that I have missed? What is it? How do you know?

The “Allness” thinking that seems to me to evidence itself in some of the preaching of Jesus might bother some people. He taught that the Pharisees and Sadducees were a generation of vipers and headed for hell (Matthew 23: 29-33) and accused the Gentiles (Matthew 6:7) of praying, loud, eloquent prayers to be seen of men. Did no decent Pharisees or Sadducees exist, and were all Gentiles hypocrites? Some people might insist that he did not mean *all* of these people, but how do you know?

Perhaps the most disturbing fact about politicians promising to make decisions on the basis of what Jesus would do is the position of Christ on punishment. He taught that people who made mistakes should be burned eternally in hell for them (Matthew 18:9). This fate was in store not only for those who did bad deeds but was also reserved for people who did not have correct beliefs (Mark 16: 15-16). His position was that only those who agreed with Him deserved eternal life and that those who believed otherwise would burn forever. The statement attributed to Jesus, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one
comes unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6) seems to imply that the population of hell will be fairly crowded. Have I missed something?

It is no wonder that the two leading candidates for the Presidency are strong supporters of “capital punishment,” a euphemism for the practice of killing criminals judged by a handful of people to be totally evil. We already have the silly and barbaric “Three-Strikes-and-You-are-Out” law. What is coming next?

The Irritating Questions General Semanticists Ask

Wendell Johnson (1946, p.59) taught us the importance of asking two troublesome questions: “What do you mean?” and “How do you know?” Because we cannot know what the Jesus question means, because there is no context involved, (What would Jesus do about what?) and have no way to find a reliable answer to it, the question on the Jesus bracelet seems to be one of those quandary-precipitating questions that have no answers (Johnson, 1946, pp. 52-57).

Using statements in documents to justify or condemn an action often creates remarkable situations. In Texas, we believe that the constitution gives us the right to carry a gun, in fact, as many as we can possibly move around with. You can get a concealed-weapons permit that allows you to carry as many handguns as you can conceal, and concealed they must be. It is against the law to carry these weapons in such a way as to reveal their presence. Is this what the Second Amendment means? Who knows? That is what it means in our state.

To many citizens, the First Amendment permits public schools to force children to pray in school. To me, this interpretation seems to require the state to mandate the practice of theism. Many people are so very upset by the current stand of the Supreme Court on this issue that they want a new amendment that specifically allows required prayer in the schools.

I have seen no examples of the prayers that would be required, however, and that particular issue might present problems for school boards throughout the country, and any required prayer would be forcing theism on students, it seems to me. Am I right?

Solutions?

Some people argue that we need to interpret the Constitution by determining what the Founding Fathers meant when they wrote it. The fact that they have all been dead for many years makes this a challenging task. I have met a few women who might like to question the Apostle Paul personally about his commandment that women should “be in submission to their husbands” and his
decree that “women should not teach in church.” The question might be stated “Just WHAT do you mean?” and “Just HOW do YOU know?”

Attempting to behave according to rules and laws stated in written “Final-Word” documents is difficult if not impossible, but what are we to do? Should we burn the Bible and abolish the Constitution? I think not.

What does occur seems to me is this: scriptures and constitutions, etc., come to be interpreted in ways that promote the best interests of people in present circumstances in the light of current knowledge. Enlightened clergy, so as to avoid legalism and fundamentalism, usually “clarify” meanings of the scriptures to bring them up-to-date (Rosten, p.149). In the United States, at least, the political process works against enforcing or permitting what citizens view as extreme interpretations of the Constitution by the Supreme Court, so that it eventually means what most people believe it should mean. In spite of the opposition of some people to this practice, we had better continue to interpret these and other important documents in ways that make the pursuit of happiness, in our day, less frustrating. We had better be opposed to legalistic interpretations of them, if we do not want them to be thrown in the garbage pail.

Legalism seems to me to be based on the position that words are containers of meaning, and that when you know the words, you know the meaning. This theory does not fit the facts. The more a person knows and understands, for example, the more (or less) meaningful written statements are for him, because when he reads, he understands through projection.

On the way home from church in years gone by, my parents and I used to express wonder about how Brother Jones got so much out of the verse that he took for his text. We did not understand that what we heard was what he put into it. This is a difficult point to understand and a more difficult one to teach.

REFERENCES

