EVERY NOW AND AGAIN, students of general semantics face the question: “What is general semantics?” This article represents my overview of potential answers. Actually, I do not answer the question as asked but as translated to: “What is general semantics about?”

The impact of Korzybski’s experiences on the battlefields of World War I led him to wonder how we humans became so advanced in the fields of science, mathematics, and technology, yet continued to behave so primitively with each other? He was very concerned with the ever expanding gap between progress in the scientific fields and the quality of our human relationships. Over a period of twelve years “[h]e studied human evaluations in science and mathematics and psychiatry, ‘at their best and at their worst’ as he put it, from the standpoint of predictability and human survival.” (*Manhood of Humanity*, page xxiii)

From a functional ‘definition’ not of what mankind is, but what mankind does, and a theory of mankind as a “time-binding class of life” (presented in his first book *Manhood of Humanity*), Korzybski formulated his “non-Aristotelian” system of “general semantics” and published his second book *Science and Sanity*. General semantics represents a “way of thinking” based on the proposition that “science and mathematics represent human thinking at its best,” and that we can make progress in our human relationships through “conscious time-binding.” Korzybski emphasizes that “human beings constitute an interdependent time-binding class of life, involving feelings of responsibility, duty towards others, and the future.” As such, general semantics is concerned with the quality of human relationships – intra-personal, social, professional, interpersonal, national, international, environmental, etc.

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To me, general semantics constitutes a system-discipline that:

- is concerned with the “sanity of the human species” leading to a general theory of psychotherapy;
- is based on principles of non-identity, non-allness, non-elementalism, the general principle of uncertainty, infinite valued maximum, probability, etc.;
- is based on a “general theory of time-binding” (which I define as a method for conscious improvement in any field of activity);
- shows how we can develop time-binding intelligence, become conscious time-binders and progress toward time-binding excellence;
- offers “a general theory of values”;
- offers a “non-elementalistic theory of meanings”;
- proposes “a time-binding foundation” for human ethics;
- is formulated as “a general theory of evaluation” — with principles we can apply to help us use our intelligences more intelligently;
- shows how “in modern scientific methods there are factors of sanity to be tested empirically.” As such, general semantics can be considered as “generalized science and mathematics”;  
- is based on a proposition that “science, and mathematics (especially the calculus) show the ‘human mind’ working at its best (in terms of predictability), and that ‘we can learn from science and mathematics how this ‘human mind’ should work, to be at its best’; 
- proposes that “structure is the only content of knowledge,” which, together with the non-identity and non-elementalism principles, creates a foundation for an up-to-date epistemology;
- offers a theory of meta-critical evaluation and a theoretical foundation for critical thinking, based on principles including “non-identity, non-allness, non-elementalism, and consciousness of abstracting”; 
- offers principles and procedures as psychological tools we can use to help us use our nervous systems more efficiently; a way of minimizing ‘stress,’ and enhancing our ‘spiritual’ and psycho-physiological wellbeing;  
- emphasizes a “non-elementalistic” organism-as-a-whole-in-environments approach, involving interconnectedness, interactivity, inter-relatedness, interdependence, etc.;  
- presents principles and procedures – tools we can use to improve and progress in any field of activity, not a haphazard affair, not depending solely on guess work, intuition, gut feelings, trial and error, but based on time-binding, heuristic methods involving creativity, cooperativeness, and interdependence;  
- emphasizes the importance of recognizing “powerful relationships among
language, thinking, attitude, and behavior” as determinants of the kinds of organizations, institutions, fields of thinking-activities, clarity of communication, and quality of relationships we have with ourselves and with others;

- incorporates principles we can apply to help us become more imaginative and creative individuals; and thinking about how we think about things, become better, more effective, more efficient planners, problem-resolvers, decision makers, etc.;
- incorporates principles we can apply to help us improve levels of consciousness, labeled “empirical, intelligent, rational, rational self-consciousness, and appropriation of rational self-consciousness”. These involve sensing-experiencing, inquiry, understanding, reflection, judgment, decision, responsibility, morality, and recognition of these levels. (I top this off with consciousness of abstracting. See Bernard Lonergan’s “Insight …A Study of Human Understanding”);
- offers principles and procedures we can use to become conscious of our abstracting (awareness that we do not and cannot cover all in our thinking, understanding, explanations, knowledge, etc.), and ‘better’ time-binding human ‘beings’.

Korzybski cautioned that we should not expect to get much benefit from general semantics by just talking about it. We have to use the principles-tools in our relationships (thoughts, feelings, attitudes, interactions, etc.) with ourselves, with others, and with our environments. These principles are elaborated on, and unfamiliar terms are broken down through lectures, demonstrations, discussions, exercises, music, short films, etc., in The Institute of General Semantics seminar-workshops.

This represents only my view of some of the characteristics of general semantics. So in the spirit of “non-allness, non-identity, and consciousness of abstracting,” I invite the reader to add to this list and share it.