On July 7, 2007, the Heinlein Centennial was held in Kansas City to celebrate what would have been the 100th birthday of acclaimed “Grand Master” science fiction author Robert A. Heinlein. Heinlein is generally acknowledged as one of the four great American science fiction writers, along with Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, and Arthur C. Clarke. Among his most notable books are *Starship Troopers*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, and *Time Enough for Love*.

On July 24, 2007, Dr. Albert Ellis died at age 93 in New York City. His front-page obituary in the *New York Times* referred to him as “one of the most influential and provocative figures in modern psychology.” He originated the field of psychotherapy known as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and authored more than 70 books, including *Overcoming Procrastination*, *How to Live With a Neurotic*, *A Guide to Rational Living*, and *How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself Miserable About Anything — Yes, Anything*.

These two accomplished and celebrated men would seem to have little in common — one a Midwesterner, Naval Academy graduate, futurist, with an almost cult-like following of fans; the other a New Yorker who was referred to as “the Lenny Bruce of psychotherapy,” known for his blue language and results-oriented approach to talk therapy.

And yet Robert Heinlein and Albert Ellis shared a common perspective, or point of view, that developed from the same source — Alfred Korzybski and general semantics.

Heinlein came to general semantics through Stuart Chase’s *The Tyranny of Words* (1938) and attended two seminars with Korzybski in 1939 and 1940. In a speech in 1941, Heinlein made the seemingly outlandish assertion that Korzybski was “at least as great a man as Einstein” based on his “monumental piece of work,”

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Ellis, so far as we know, never met Korzybski but credited him (and general semantics) as a major influence in his development of REBT, using descriptors such as brilliant, masterpiece, and pioneer.

I attended the Heinlein Centennial in Kansas City. One of the panel sessions I attended was on “The Competent Man.” I learned this was a theme of Heinlein’s that recurred throughout his novels. An oft-repeated quote from Heinlein’s novel *Time Enough for Love* concerns competency as a general trait:

A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects.

I had the privilege to hear Dr. Ellis speak on one memorable occasion a few years ago. In recalling that talk and in reviewing several of his writings, it seems to me that “competency” was also a recurring theme in his work, specifically as it related to cognitive competency.

As the lives and contributions of these two great men — Robert A. Heinlein and Dr. Albert Ellis, just seven years apart in age — shared the news pages in the same recent month, we choose to devote this special section of *ETC* to them.

The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the president. You realize that you control your own destiny.

**Albert Ellis**

I am free, no matter what rules surround me. If I find them tolerable, I tolerate them; if I find them too obnoxious, I break them. I am free because I know that I alone am morally responsible for everything I do.

**Robert A. Heinlein**