

Psychosynthesis Research Foundation

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November 1, 1967

Dear Colleague:

The second meeting of the 1967/68 series of Psychosynthesis Seminars (held on the third Friday of each month) will take place on Friday, November 17th at 7:30 P.M.

Dr. William Wolf of New York City will speak on "The Principles of General Semantics in relation to Psychosynthesis," followed by our customary discussion period.

The meeting will start promptly at 7:30 P.M. and will be held in the "Directors Room" on the mezzanine floor, Park Sheraton Hotel, 7th Avenue and 55th Street, New York City. There is a public car park across the street from the hotel.

We trust it will be possible for you to be present.

Cordially,

JACK COOPER, M.D.
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Scarsdale, N.Y. 10583
Tel: 914-725-4541

Date & Time of Meeting: Friday, November 17, 1967 - 7:30 P.M. prompt.

Place: "Directors Room", mezzanine floor, Park Sheraton Hotel,
7th Ave. & 55th St., New York City.

Speaker: William Wolf, M.D.

Subject: The Principles of General Semantics in relation
to Psychosynthesis.

PSYCHOSYNTHESIS SEMINARS--NEW YORK

1967/8 SERIES

Second Meeting: November 17, 1967

The Principles of General Semantics in relation to Psychosynthesis

Speaker: William Wolf, M.D.

Participants:

Phil Carter
Winnie Colton
Jack Cooper, M.D.
Martha Crampton, M.A.
Wm. Erwin, Ph.D.
Marjorie Fife
Wm. P. Gellerman, Ph.D.
Geo. Greenberg, Ph.D.
Frank Haronian, Ph.D.

Frank & Hilda Hilton
Earl Johnson
Emmanuel D. Kotsos, M.D.
Earl Sherry
Graham Taylor, M.D.
Shirley Winston, Ph.D.

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Dr. William Wolf:

General Semantics is a term coined by Alfred Korzybski, a Polish count who during the first world war was sent to Canada in order to recruit troops for the Polish army. At that time he had only a meager knowledge of the English language. By profession he was a civil engineer where he made wide use of mathematics when drawing plans for various buildings, bridges and other structures. During his time in Canada he asked himself the question: "Now I am an engineer and I draw specifications for a structure indicating the size of beams, rivets, etc. on a drawing, and if the contractor follows the written directions accurately then I am certain that the final structure will be as I wanted it to be, and I have no problem. Since mathematics is a language comparable to any other language, how is it that in mathematics I get an exact communication with the contractor; he understands me without errors, and he can follow my directions. Why cannot that be done equally well with Polish, English, or any other language?"

An everyday language, he pondered, has so many possibilities of errors that although we are all the same human beings speaking the same language we cannot understand in many instances what the other person is saying - misinterpreting messages, meanings and so on. To make matters worse, the same holds true when we use other ways of communication which are not verbal, such as gestures, postures, silences, emphasis, intonation and whatever; which we call "meta-languages." As Korzybski pondered over these questions he eventually came up with the thought "Well, of course, the mathematical language is understandable because it always refers to a unit, one. An expression is either more or less than one; and you can always relate it back to the number one. This is unique with mathematics and impossible with any other language. When he wished to name the science he reasoned this way: "Language is a way of communicating. The study of language - which is made up of words - is called semantics, where the derivation of words, their meaning, various forms and so on is studied." Not knowing English very well, Korzybski then said "Well, if this is semantics, and if we expand it into other means of communications we will call it 'General Semantics', denoting that we employ other ways of communicating in addition to using words. By using this general term I can come close to the exactness of mathematics which I love and know so well."

This book, Science and Sanity, gives the basic principles of general semantics. It was Korzybski's principal work. In it he pointed out most of the difficulties with our ordinary languages and communications. He says, for example, that if one uses words which amount to no more than making sounds of some kind, or some scribbles on a surface, there are a number of places where errors readily creep in. A person has a thought which he wants to communicate. Now this thought in itself is a basic entity or concept plus his personal "sieve" - his way of interpreting that particular thought based upon his experiences, his style of life and so on. So in the first place it must be clear to the individual himself what he wants to communicate. Then there is the question of actually conveying it by some medium, either by sound or a written symbol that has to be legible or understandable by the other person. We in the medical line have this trouble all the time because notoriously nobody can usually read what we have written, but we expect the other person to know what is being meant by our scribbles.

The spoken word has to go through a medium - say the air or whatever the medium is made of - and that has to do with distance, background noises and so on. So a distortion is possible at that point.

And then you come to the individual for whom the message is meant, and there you have comparable difficulties. Does the person see or hear the thing in the way I meant it to be? Is the person hard of hearing, or perhaps does he see well, or wear 'rose-colored glasses'; or is there some other kind of difficulty with regard to attention influences, distortions, etc.?

The next point is: how does the individual interpret what is being transmitted? Is it the way in which I interpret the message or is it the way the other person interprets it? And that is, of course, very questionable in a great many instances. Also does the other person understand my language and does he know my meaning of words or is his experience with the particular word the same or different from mine? I had an interesting experience some time ago where I was treating a patient and as we were talking, every time the word "table" was used the patient would suddenly withdraw into herself and become pale. At first I did not know why; but this person happened to have been in the London blitz and "table" for that person meant "danger and to crawl under." It was an automatic reaction whereby table meant that something was coming down from the ceiling from which she had to protect herself.

Now "table" is a very simple word. Take an abstract term like justice or happiness or something of that nature and see how these difficulties are multiplied.

So since we are communicating verbally by means of these symbols, we have to take into account and be aware of difficulties that may arise in various phases of that communication. This is of great importance; for instance, Dr. Greenberg and I were attending a Hypnosis Seminar last week and certain questions came up, one of which concerned General Semantics. When a person is in the hypnotic state he takes a communication quite differently from one who is not in the hypnotic state. As you probably know, in that state an individual is much more alert and clear in a particular focussed direction, and very literal. So you have to come down to what we call a very low level of abstraction; in other words, make the statement as unambiguous as possible. Ordinary language which may be perfectly admissible in the normal, conscious state may not at all be permissible when the person is in a trance, or when you do imagery in psychosynthetic work.

And so Korzybski felt that there should be measures whereby language can be made considerably more accurate. He said that there are several ways in which you can do that; one is to use what he called "Five Devices". These are: Indexing; Dating; Etc. ("etcetera" is a very important conception in General Semantics); Hyphen, and Quotes.

Indexing has to do with the following: if you use general terms, such as "man" you must know that there is no such thing as man, or "furniture", or any other collective term. What does exist is a man by the name of Jones; and the man Jones is not the same as the man Smith. Therefore, what Korzybski then did was to say: "there is 'man 1', 1 being the index which is 'Jones,' and then 'man 2' would be Mr. Smith, and so on. So if one wishes to communicate meaningfully to another you have to index mentally and be specific in your expression and speak about man 1, or man 2, or man 3.

For instance, if you say "barking dogs don't bite," this may be true or not. Barking dog 1 doesn't bite, barking 2 doesn't bite but the barking dog 3 may bite. Therefore, if you simply say, "barking dogs don't bite" it is not a correct statement, and indexing would help you here to be more accurate and you would say, "I can only tell you that dogs 1 and 2 don't bite but dog 3 may." This is a way of communicating that is less susceptible to error.

Dating has to do with the fact that an event at one time differs from the same event - or equivalent event for there is no such thing as "same" - at another time. That is, for example, Mr. Jones in 1967 is not the same as Mr. Jones in 1966; he is a different individual for in the meantime he has had new experiences; circumstances have changed, etc. So if you speak of a man you have not only to add his name, you also have to mention of what time you are speaking in order to make the language more accurate. This holds true of every event or anything that you speak about. Any happening will partake of these two features, expressed in order to make it really intelligible.

The question of Etc. has to do with the following: whenever you speak of an event, an object or something that the object does or that is done to the object, it can be described up to a point, but there are always an infinite number of factors about the event which are omitted. And the "Etc." reminds one of the fact that the event has been described to the extent that I choose to, but somebody else might take other features out of that event and describe them; and he would be equally correct. So the point here is that in looking at or describing an event it is always incomplete. If you take this object here, the table, for instance, and you ask "What is this?" You may answer "this is a table - it is green, it has certain dimensions, such a hardness, such a temperature, etc., etc." That is fine, it is a good description - up to a point. But then I come and say, "Have you taken into account that there is a thickness to the board here, or that it is simply a mass of whirling electrons, or that it is standing here?" In other words, you have omitted many, many factors which are not mentioned and which are not communicated but simply ignored; and this is where this "Etc." comes in. No statement is ever complete. When you say you are going to describe something fully, it just cannot possibly be true!

The "Hyphen" has to do with the question of what Korzybski calls "elementalization." This refers to taking an element out of a situation or context and looking at it without its relationship to other things. In order to indicate that a thing has a relationship to something else you put a hyphen, so that when you say "table" it is in relation to, let us say, the floor, because the same table in a different relationship is not the same table. If you turn it upside down, for example, it is no longer meaningfully the same thing.

Quotes have to do with the fact that when you, for instance, utter the word "apple" it is no more than a quotation. In other words to realize that all you are doing is quoting a word, keeping in mind the fact that when you say something it isn't the thing itself.

Korzybski gave us these devices to keep subconsciously in mind as we try to communicate a message to another. But this is also true in communication with yourself - which is probably equally or possibly even more important. We call the latter thinking or emoting, but it is a communication nevertheless

to yourself and with yourself. The same factors of distortion and difficulty occur here; in other words, possible distortions as to how you perceive things in communicating with another, except that you don't have to consider another person but yourself twice. Remember that you yourself really don't know yourself too well - just as you do not fully know the other person.

Now, one of the things Korzybski always stressed was that when one receives a communication of some kind he has one of two reactions: one is rational, reasoning, and the other is what he called a "signal" reaction. A signal reaction is one which is spontaneous, where one is not conscious of it. One reacts automatically. Unfortunately, since Korzybski did not know anatomy and physiology too accurately, he called it thalamic. He knew that the term "thalamic" had to do with the thalamus and since the thalamus is not in the conscious area of the brain he spoke of a "thalamic reaction." The word "signal reaction" seems to be much better. To illustrate this sort of signal reaction: There was a time when the word "Russia" would produce anger or fear in an individual - even now it does this at times with some people. Today it may be "Viet-Cong." "Hurrah!" will produce a happy reaction. Any emotionally charged word will produce a signal reaction. It is not logically produced; it is purely emotional, non-conscious.

Another term which he liked to use was "semantic reaction" A semantic reaction is one where you react to a symbol, a word. This is quite different from reacting to an object or to an actual concrete experience. A semantic reaction is where you react to a word - written or spoken. The reaction may be physical - that is, psychosomatic, an internal change - or a physical action in that you actually do something. It may also be simply a thought or a traumatic or possibly elating sensation even though it need not necessarily be registering as such.

There are other features that Korzybski stressed: for example, I have here a picture (here Dr. Wolf held up a two-page spread advertisement of two cars. Ed.) What is it? (Answer from one of the participants: "Two cars.") It is two cars? What would you say is the value, say within, \$200? (Voice from the audience: "The cars or the picture?") Ah! that is the point! Most of us would say "This is a car"; and upon this fact is based all the advertising, all the propaganda measures of influencing, forcing certain ideas and so on. In advertising they go even further; secondary symbols - such as a pretty girl - are substituted for the car as the principal point. Most advertisers' persuasion is based upon such symbolic presentations, inferences, high order abstractions and ignoring of the five "Aids" mentioned.

This principle is very clearly expressed by Korzybski in the phrase "the map is not the territory." This is one of the principal ideas that he would keep driving into students over and over again. It is amazing how difficult it is for most people to differentiate between this (the advertisement) and a car itself. This gentleman (who answered the last question) has obviously had some General Semantics. He was therefore careful to recognize that all that I am showing here is a picture.

We have to be very careful therefore about what is being thrown in our direction, what is map and what is territory. If I simply say that (drawing two points on the blackboard. Ed.) this is Chicago and this is New York, and say that this (the line joining the two points on the board) is my path, it is perfectly all right, but this isn't Chicago, nor is this New York; this is a point

mark on the blackboard, and if I become involved in looking at Chicago as a point it may be very useful as giving me a means of choosing the road to it, but it is what Korzybski called "unsane" (not insane, but unsane) - to confuse map and territory.

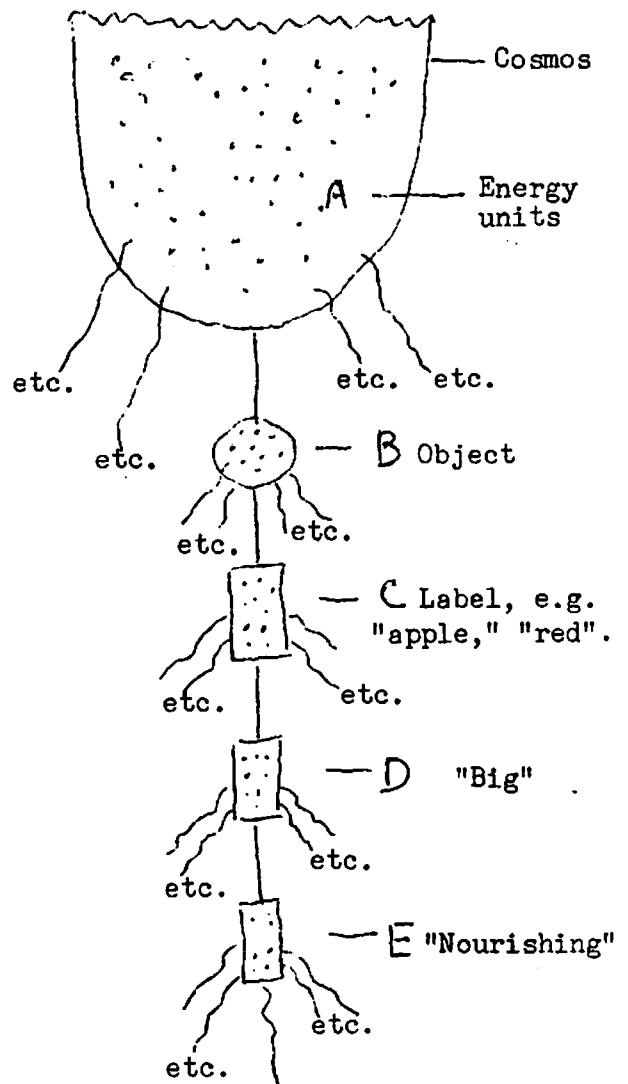
In order to make the thing much clearer he devised what he called a "structural differential." A structural differential is this: he drew a parabolic shape which is broken on top, something like this.

It represented or indicated infinity, the cosmos; and the cosmos is visualized as containing or consisting of an infinite number of energy units or elements - symbolized by the dots in the diagram.

He said that out of this cosmos certain objects arise (how they arise no one knows). Some of these elementary energy units conglomerate into an object, some inanimate and others animate, living objects, and he drew a line here (B) and called it the object level. This object is made up of a number of these particles that have been concentrated into it. All the other particles here (A) don't apply - they do nothing or form some other object. Now this object, when you perceive it, is so far non-verbal; in other words, it is just an experience to you without you having labeled it or put a name on it.

Your next step is to label and call it, say, a "table" or "apple." This you do by recognizing measurements - say, this object is 3 inches by 2 inches, it is this and that consistency and so on, describing it in concrete terms, and you stay on that level before and until you have called it an apple. That is, you have had just the experience of an object which, eventually, since it has these measurements, this color, etc., is called an apple. This (C) is now labeled.

Next you can go and talk about this labeled object and say "it is a large apple," or a small one, etc. That is at the next level. Then you can talk about this yet again and call it a "nourishing" apple. The further down you go, the less accurate you become, for obviously "nourishing" doesn't mean anything definite, for while the green color or the size is pretty well recognizable the "nourishing" refers only to what goes on in you. Then you can go further and say it is "healthy"; which again raises the question "healthy for what or for whom?"



So, you can go on indefinitely and talk about each label further and further; and Korzybski speaks of each level of abstraction as "higher", (actually you should turn this diagram upside down if you want to talk about "higher"). Each time you talk about a label, and then keep on talking about it, you are making it less and less accurate, more and more diffuse, until you eventually come right back to the cosmos (A). In other words, it becomes eventually a meaningless term, a tautology or axiomatic; i.e. just a "given" statement.

The reason he went into this so minutely is because he felt that one of the great difficulties in languages is that we confuse one level of abstraction with another; or we confuse the object level with a very high abstraction - for instance, one immediately goes into the label "healthy" before one has really gone into the description of the object "apple" in consecutive terms. The order of the levels of abstraction must go in an orderly manner if one is to remain accurate, so that a label on one level leads to the label at the next higher level. If you jump the order you get into considerable confusion in recognizing or realizing what an individual is speaking about. Advertisers, poets and others do this purposefully.

The important thing here is to recognize that as soon as you go beyond the silent level (B on diagram) and call it something and become verbal you are no longer dealing with the object, you are simply dealing with sounds - this sound about another sound, and so on; so that if you really wish to communicate with yourself or with others you must recognize that whatever you say about the thing is never the thing itself - never! It cannot be because what you are saying is simply your voicing something. It refers - and that is what the word "semantics" means. Semantics comes from the Greek word "semain" which means to point. Now if you point to the moon, you don't reach it and you don't have the moon, you just have a finger. And this is what all these semains, these signs, words, mean in terms of relating or pointing towards the non-verbal thing, the object, which is the only thing that is real.

Now as you go from this level to that level (B to C on diagram. Ed.) what you actually do is that you take out one or two of these elements and on the basis of them you give it a label. There are a great many other things that are hanging loose but are not taken into account in talking about this object, and the same is true as you go down the levels; you pick certain essentials or certain significant factors and on that basis you go into the various levels of abstraction. Never may we forget that there are always some loose ends, loose threads, and these may be picked up by somebody else and he will describe the object in other terms which would be just as correct, so that the argument that one is right and the other wrong is likely to be invalid.

One of the factors that gives us a good deal of trouble is the tiny little English word "is" - and all its forms, such as "are", "be", "was", "were", etc. The reason is that we do not differentiate between the various ways the word "is" can be applied. The one that gives us the difficulty is what is called "the 'is' of identity." E.g.: "He IS a thief", or "He IS a carpenter." There are other ways of using the word "is," which are innocuous; for instance, "he is having so and so," using it as an auxiliary verb; or it may be used for a location, e.g., "He is in Chicago." These do not give us trouble; it is the "is of identity," for if I say "He IS a thief" I am taking the whole person as being one quality; but if I say "He has stolen something," I am correct, if he did so. Also, it will not produce ordinarily an altercation if you simply

circumscribe the event by saying "He has done this or that"; but if you say "He IS a thief or IS a king, etc.", you put into the statement something which actually does not belong there, in addition to the few statements which you do want to belong.

The word "is" when it has the connotation of identity should be carefully avoided if possible. This is particularly important in the hypnotic trance, or any other psychotherapy. Avoid labeling a person that he is this or that, because no one is just one thing. If a person is labeled a thief we do him an injustice for he can be described by many other attributes; he is a father, a golfer, etc. - which are not taken into account. And even in ordinary conversation a criticism is usually better taken if one communicates the action that an individual has performed rather than that he is labeled in his entirety in one particular expression.

The question has been raised - and we talked about it a good deal when we were in Oslo, Norway, this summer at the "Mankind--2,000" Meeting - whether in the future there will be possibilities of communication of thoughts directly from one brain into another. Now this, of course, is far out, but as you know there are a good many experiments going on in which direct communication is attempted or claimed. One of them is, for example, the experiments in Maimonides Hospital where a person will try to transmit an idea or thought to a dreaming person and produce in the dream state evidence of a direct communication. Another is Dr. Eisenbud's work with Serios in photographing thoughts and ideas - but how much of that is true or valid we don't know, but it is very interesting. Eisenbud is quite an intelligent man and a trained psychiatrist, and a great many people have watched the evidence and carefully looked for fraud. Apparently no one has been able to find any. It seems possible for this boy to transmit something that he thinks of to a photographic film. This would then be a direct communication where the symbol would be jumped, where these various possibilities of errors which I mentioned in the beginning of my talk would have been sidetracked.

There is also the factor of various psychedelic drugs whereby certain direct communications seem to be facilitated at that time. What happens? How does it occur that under certain circumstances you can communicate directly without the interposition of a symbol or the interposition of media through which the communicated message has to travel? These are very interesting questions which Korzybski, at that time, of course, did not know about; these things have occurred since his time, but it makes one wonder whether we may not eventually be able to communicate in a manner that will be directly meaningful; or that may enable an individual to communicate directly with himself in some manner - which is the basis of a good many of the ritualistic drug takers in Mexico, India and other places where they do take these drugs in order to communicate with themselves in a more direct manner. Whether or not that can be worked out I do not know, but it is certainly an interesting thought to delve into.

Interestingly enough, if you use the extensionalizing aids - the indexing, dating, and the other devices - they lend themselves even to helping inductive thinking. In other words, you take a number of events, put them into a package and you produce a thought, in contra-distinction to deductive thinking (which Korzybski rather disliked) where you simply have a concept and from the concept deduce certain events that you expect to occur. Being a mathematician and very accurate, Korzybski was very suspicious of that. He called it "intensional" (spelled with an s not a t) thinking, as the opposite of extensional. I would like to hear a discussion as to how you feel about the discouragement of

intensional thinking.

Now in psychosynthesis intensional thinking is very useful and helpful, but there are a great many traps. For instance, if you take what Martha Crampton speaks about in her "Who am I?" method, this is very largely intensional thinking, and we feel in our group here that here intensional thinking is a very valid thing, and yet one which Korzybski fought tooth and nail. He went to great pains in discouraging it.

In Euclidian geometry it was thought that everything could be explained by his teachings if one only studied him enough, but now we find that if we take a three or four dimensional view Euclidian geometry is insufficient; and Korzybski recognized that. As a matter of fact, most of us think largely in only two dimensions even though we are capable of thinking in three. Usually we think of going in a particular direction, and that direction is from here to there, a two dimensional way of thinking, rather than taking a far broader view which is likely to require intensional thinking, of which Korzybski was a great sceptic.

I am going to stop here, hoping that during the discussion we can bring out a few other points.

Discussion:

Cooper: Touching on these various levels that Dr. Wolf spoke of, in working with these psychopaths at the Penitentiary we continually run into their masks; and in their paintings they are always revealing the mask. They show that they identify themselves with a type of mask, or persona, and it is interesting - and also helpful - in working with them to show them that the therapist also has a mask. Masks can have battles, for we can see things at different levels; it has been most helpful in working with the psychopathic individual who tends to think in a very simple form or way.

Another point, re direct communication, around the turn of the century wasn't there a man - called Anderson or Crawford - who could look through a microscope at chemicals on slides and as they would congeal or become crystalline he could make pictures on the slides - his thinking affected the congealing process or crystal formation?

Colton: About these levels of abstraction; when I speak of the "apple" and then go beyond it, it seems like intensional thinking to me. If I say "I am an apple," "I am big," "I am delicious," "I am healthy" - that seems like intensional thinking. (Wolf: But you are not the apple.) But assuming that I were.

Wolf: Yes, then if you were an apple, that would be intensional thinking. It's just the way we are thinking, the way we are labeling those things. In other words, in these various levels I speak and I put words into some description of the description of the description and so on. This is what I do, the human being and eventually I come to such a diffuse kind of description that I eventually come back to where I started.

Erwin: I was confused because my impression is that if you go to the more abstract levels you go to apple, and then, rather than talking about specific characteristics, you talk about food which is a higher level of abstraction....

Dr. Wolf: And then you get back here (A in diagram. Ed.) and into meaningless terms. As a matter of fact, if you want to get somebody mad quickly tell him that he never really knows what he is saying. And you can do that very easily by simply asking "what is a table?" and he says "It is a piece of furniture." Then I ask "What is furniture?" It is something you put in a room. Then I ask "What do you mean 'put'?" and you keep on going until you eventually come to either a tautology where you explain one word by another or you come to an axiomatic statement that "it just is."

You can do that with any kind of an object: I ask you "What is a glass?" It is a container. "What is a container?" Something that holds something. "Holds what?" Something. "What is something?"; and at this point you cannot go any further because something is nothing. Or if you say "contain" what does it mean? Contain means you can put something in. "What do you mean by 'put'?" So you see that you don't have to ask very many questions before you eventually come to a word or term which cannot be substituted or explained by anything else other than using one description for another description or simply come back to a nonsense level.

Korzybski's General Semantics is something that one should know because it gives one the opportunity to think accurately and down to earth - which is good practice and exercise. I don't know that it is really valid or whether it is useful in psychosynthesis because it is in many ways inhibiting. The significance that I see in General Semantics is that it trains us in will power, and to think accurately, but we should at the same time know that it has limiting effects whereby the imagination, which Korzybski suspected very much, is reduced. And as you read a number of books on the uses of general semantics, whether by Lee, Hayakawa, Chapman, etc., you find these writers tend to subdue their imagination. They are drawn to general semantics because it is a very soothing thing since they have their feet on the ground, rather preferring this to floating as we do in imagination up in the air. On the other hand, it is this that gives us life. In other words, General Semantics is for us too prosaic, as I see it, and yet it is a good exercise. I personally would not have wanted to miss it. It helped me discipline the quality of thinking and the mind in a way where one can always come back to earth if one wants to. However, one does not want to become compulsive about it, thereby becoming anchored to the floor and say "woe to me if ever I let go!" This is the balance that one must strive to strike, particularly now where we have science fiction coming true. It has been shown, for instance, that it is possible to change the rate of growth of plants by extra sensory means. Whether or not this will eventually hold water I don't know, but certainly you cannot, off hand, simply throw it away, because I do think that the possibility does exist.

One of the things we would like to experience in common with schizophrenics is a loosened ego boundary; that is, a state where the ego boundary, like that of a schizophrenic, is permeable. We want to be able to experience certain features of the schizophrenic without being schizophrenic; and that, I think, is a goal worthwhile aiming for. The schizophrenic has something valuable; unfortunately he is a sick person, but to be healthy and have this particular schizophrenic experience, I think, is a useful thing. Here is where the experience with LSD is very helpful, because it does just that temporarily; it has also bad features, but this particular feature I think is a good one.

Greenberg: How would you categorize Korzybski himself, was he a rather obsessive person?

Wolf: He was compulsive and often rather rigid. He was in continuous pain because both his hips were diseased - one was dislocated and the other broken and he had a great deal of difficulty in walking around; he needed a special car and so on, and in order to overcome his pain had to drink heavily, and to soothe himself he smoked a great many cigarettes a day, and in that way he functioned beautifully. (Question: "When was the book written?") It was written in 1931 or 2, and, I believe, at that time he was already drinking rather heavily. He was a most delightful individual, with a great deal of wit; but he was very rigid and obsessive and I believe that is why he wrote in the way he did, the way he emphasized certain attitudes which keep you right down to earth, and anything that you cannot nail down somewhere pained him. Then he would work day and night; if he had any idea that was in any way "loose," it would not let him sleep until he could put it in the framework of any of these extensional devices - how do I index it and how do I date it and do I put it into context and relationship and so on, to get it into a solid enclosure? This was a very definite characteristic of his. Undoubtedly his physical problem influenced him very much; and this compulsive smoking etc. and compulsive overcoming of his pain was all part of his personality, part of his life style; and yet, as I said, he was a most charming individual, with all the grace of an aristocrat. You must recognize that this was he; if he were to look into psychosynthesis, he would probably look at some phases askance.

Taylor: We in psychosynthesis have difficulty in connection with the concept of the self, now if Korzybski were still around - and obsessive as he was - how do you think he would handle our approach or tackle the concept of the self? Would he think of it as a symbol, as a concept?

Wolf: He would probably say "Whose self? at what time? what is it I am trying to express? what am I looking at? what is it in relationship to?"; and he would try to bring it down to as low a level of abstraction as possible, and then say "I am only talking about it!" "How can I express anything about myself?" As a matter of fact, that is true in our work here, because what you are actually saying about it - about "Who am I?" - is just a substitute for an experience, and sometimes it may be a good substitute and other times it may not be.

Korzybski would say "I am giving you one or two things but I cannot tell you the whole about Self"; which is, of course, true. In other words, we must recognize that the person cannot possibly tell you the experience itself, under any circumstances, but he can tell you about significant aspects, he can fit certain elements and then say, "All right, pick a few more." Then eventually this would give an inferential picture, an inferential idea. Have you anything to say on that, Mrs. Crampton?

Crampton: I understand that someone has written a book on Zen and General Semantics. I think it has to do with getting back to a non-verbal level.

Wolf: Korzybski had dealt with that non-verbal thing; he would do something like this (Dr. Wolf dropped a paper carton on the table. Ed.) and say "What is this?" Someone would say, "It dropped." He would say, "No, it just is."

Erwin: The answer to that question, "Who am I?", is to stop talking! (Wolf: Yes,

Winston: I wonder if Korzybski didn't actually progress from stressing communication to denying the reality of an event. (Wolf: He never got that far.) For instance, all of us experience emotion, feeling, concepts; which are real events to us and for which perhaps we have no language to communicate. Would Korzybski be a little afraid to deal with an event for which language simply does not exist?

Wolf: He would not be afraid of it, but he would be uncomfortable. In other words, he would recognize a non-verbal communication with oneself and others. Korzybski spends a good deal of space on that in his book. He would say "Well now, what are we going to do with that experience? As soon as we want to communicate it we have to do it by way of symbols - words, gestures or whatever." Then, as soon as you begin to do that, then you ask yourself at what level of abstraction and how can you use it that way? Korzybski would feel quite uncomfortable until he got to the point where he could be clear on this. This he called extensionalization.

Winston: But it seems to me that art - and perhaps psychotherapy is one of the arts - what we do with these private experiences is to use words or symbols not so much to extensionalize or to communicate precisely, but to elicit the same emotion in the other person, and to communicate in this way directly. Certainly in poetry the words are not there to extensionalize the concept but to arouse the private experience, give the other person a similar experience. How would Korzybski handle this kind of question?

Wolf: This is very interesting. Korzybski would say: "Now here on the upper level, on the object level, is a way of communicating and when you come to a higher abstraction, as it is in poetry, then you communicate something to the other but you don't know what you are communicating. In other words, he strove to be accurate and sure, as he was with mathematics. You must always remember that he was a mathematician and that he knew that with mathematics he could communicate accurately. Now by music, poetry or some similar art you produce a feeling in the other person, but you have only a fair degree of control over its effect on the other. You may, with a certain poetic expression, experience within yourself a great elation or a great depression or some emotion; but what evidence have you of what it will do to me - unless you guess at it or assume, since you know me, that this is probably going to happen. But this is not a mathematical certainty, and he wanted to do things mathematically reliable. That is the point, and that is why I stressed right at the beginning that he was so intent, almost obsessed with mathematics.

Haronian: You spoke of Korzybski being witty and charming, could you say anything about his personal life?

Wolf: He came here from Poland to Canada. He was with the artillery division of the Polish forces, and when he was through militarily in 1918 he came to the United States. He married a gifted artist, a painter, and they got along very well, although all in all they were not together too much. She lived in Chicago, was bothered with a good many rheumatoid problems and, as you know, rheumatoid people are frequently very rigid and compulsive in the sense that they are taking on everybody's burdens. This is one of the characteristics of people with rheumatoid arthritis, and does not lend itself to too much flexibility, obviously. She too was a very charming person in her own way. The two, both being somewhat compulsive got along very nicely as long as their relationship was not too close. She was turning out beautiful pictures, sold some, and won all sorts of prizes while he was working on these different problems, lecturing most of the time and

and giving seminars and writing articles. He was busy hammering out his General Semantics because this was his life. Charlotte Schuchardt was his constant companion and before she married did all his writing, always travelled with him, cared for him, put him in his specially equipped car and took him out of it as was necessary because he could not very well walk by himself. She would arrange all his lectures and trips and the various things which had to be done. She was such a great believer in Korzybski that she felt this to be her life; she loved to do it, which made it a very nice relationship. She had a tough time with him, of course, because he liked to drink and smoke so much; and she tried in vain to do something about it, but could not, largely because he was so much in pain and he needed this relief. (Haronian: You had a special relationship with him.) Yes, but that is another story; you simply asked me what his type of life was. He was a very delightful and a highly intellectual person - in fact, over-intellectual. If you are over-intellectual you can easily get into those sorts of intensive habits.

Winston: It occurs to me, as it must have to other people here, that to build up such a defense against fantasy and emotionalism, he must have been a highly emotional individual....

Wolf: You are absolutely right. He was highly emotional and easily went into elation or depression; and many of these bouts were corrected with a tumbler of spirits.

When I accepted to speak on General Semantics tonight, it was to point out what G.S. can do for us. First of all one should know about it; and secondly, there are areas where it fits into psychosynthesis. As I indicated General Semantics teaches one to discipline his mind. In our imagery production General Semantics can greatly help, by way of accurate and unambiguous verbal expressions, to lead the patient meaningfully and more predictably in the desired direction. Also, by tending toward low order abstractions and preferring verbs over nouns, much time and effort may be saved in opening doors in the patient's expression of experiences.

I did not mean for example to suggest that General Semantics, which is a purely intellectual discipline, would be a psychosynthesis methodology.

Hilton: Would not its main contribution to psychology or psychotherapy be in helping to break down the narrow separative thinking of various "schools" - in other words, they would come to realize that they had been thinking too much in terms of labels or rigid concepts.

Wolf: Yes, that is a very good idea. In other words, the question of labeling - "I am a Freudian" or "I am a Jungian" and all that. You see, this would come under the heading of Quotes - "What do I call a thing?" There is a book by Stuart Chase, The Tyranny of Words, in which he mentions in detail how we are tyrannized by labels. We have it in medicine; for example, when we label a disease pneumonia, schizophrenia, and so on, we are tyrannized and strait-jacketed into a specific picture; and then we say "This is schizophrenia, but it is this particular variety" or "This is a pneumonia with a different type of coccus causing it." In other words, you must talk about a label and then make exceptions. As I mentioned when I talked about the future, we will have to use a computer language; so that we will have to get rid of old labels anyhow because eventually straight data, not labels or names of entities, will be fed into computers to an

ever larger extent, as is already the case in the California Kaiser Clinic which I mentioned in my last talk here some months ago.

Cooper: This concept of the unsane, not the insane, possibly has to do with neuro-research on the rapid eye movement, which shows we must go quietly insane for 80 minutes a night; and then in order to maintain our sanity we have to dream. Possibly Korzybski's heavy consumption of alcohol, which we know cuts out cerebral activity, may have been a compensating mechanism so that he was by these means maintaining his sanity in his relationship to his environment. We see this in a lot of brain injured people - everything has to be neatly ordered; if anything is moved it is quite disturbing to them. So if we think of it in that connection may be we will understand General Semantics a little bit better.

I am interested in this idea of "going quietly schizophrenic" to determine what it is while still maintaining one's balance. In treating schizophrenics may be we can help them become more sane by recognizing their unsanity. I like that term. In this idea we might have an opening wedge to work with them; and in working with psychosynthesis with some of my patients this is what has been happening - to help them come back from the levels of abstraction to the object; and then start re-defining the terms. So I can see this fitting into the psychosynthesis approach.

Crampton: So many of the humanistic psychology approaches are doing this essentially with awareness, experiencing an object without labeling it.

Cooper: And then the next thing is this mask phenomenon; and in certain work, the "as if" techniques - where you operate as if you know what is going on. In other words you are experiencing the object as it is without labels. Possibly we are getting back to some of the Indian primitive ways in which they would have a child experience water in all of its ways before they applied a name to it or a label; but we usually go about it the opposite way! So in treating the ill person we must learn how they were conditioned and help them to fill in the gaps with psychosynthesis on one side and General Semantics on the other - if we can see the whole field, then we can see what are the gaps, what is missing in the patient.

Johnson: I was wondering about what appeared to be one of Korzybski's starting points - that mathematics is so different from other languages - whether the difference might not be less than we think. He, as an engineer, was drawing plans for a contractor who also had experienced mathematics. Now I know very little about mathematics so that it does not communicate to me, and ^{with} any communication whether verbal or not, if it is between people who have had many shared experiences, there is clear communication, where to others it might appear very ambiguous and unintelligible.

Wolf: You are quite right, of course, if you have a person who is also acquainted with that same language you will have much better reception for it; but in Korzybski's case actually he gave instructions to a contractor, and the contractor is simply a businessman who buys materials and delivers it so the foreman can then give directions to put in so many of these and so many of the others, etc., so that he doesn't really have to know much apart from reading numbers and be able to order the right size of beams or whatever. Of course, if you want to communicate with another person verbally, the other person must know your language and, if possible, should have the same experiences with the words that you have had.

Mrs. Hilton: After the year 2,000 - when it is almost assumed we shall be communicating telepathically - I can see great complications, can't you? (laughter) But will they both have the same definition of the things they are "talking" about or, rather, thinking about?

Wolf: But you see, if you communicate your thought, where you have a correct conception of what you want to communicate, that whole thing can be communicated in that way to the other person, but of course it would be your conception of it.

Erwin: I don't know about that; I think you would use your own thought to interpret it. As a telepathic thought comes in you distort it with your own thinking.

Winston: Not only a distortion, but a real difference in conception. My conception of a man may be very different from your conception of a man; and if we were communicating telepathically, if I was to try to communicate "a man" I could give you a completely accurate picture of my concept but you might receive something quite different. (Wolf: The question is whether I would receive the message in toto as it is in you, and then I may or may not distort it. In other words, what I would receive would be your conception and I would see just as you see it now, for if you see a patient you have to look at his situation with his eyes, not with yours.) But if you communicated telepathically you would have to receive my concept as it is within me which means that you would have to receive my own individual concept of the total gestalt that goes with it. (Mrs. Hilton: Or we find a common denominator in the transferred thought, which general semantics has helped to bring in.) (Wolf: Yes, right.)

Cooper: But then you would have a team approach of five or six people and they would put the pieces together and then may be you would come back to the object again!

Winston: I want to say that at the very basis of Korzybski's system is a fallacy because he assumes that the object is always the object. It isn't always the object....(Wolf: But the object as such is always the object.) But it is only what it is in the particular frame of reference; an object does not exist separately from its frame of reference in any real way. (Wolf: In your mind it doesn't exist, but in itself it exists - irrespective of your mind.)

Erwin:(?) That is a very high level of abstraction!

Wolf: No, you see, at that time there is no abstraction at all because I haven't received it; it just exists.

Winston: But in the object as it exists in itself the "etc's." are infinite. Any object by itself can have an infinity of qualities depending upon the receiver. (Wolf: Yes.) Therefore, the object by itself is almost anything, nothing. (Wolf: Yes, that's right. You see, where there is just the object there is no human mind.)

Winston: But to even detach an object from the cosmos involves some mind. It is not detached from the cosmos except through the action of human mind. Another human mind might abstract somewhat differently and see a different object. Even to see the apple as apart from the tree is already an act of abstraction. To

some minds the apple and tree may be all one.

Wolf: You are quite right, but this of course brings up the philosophical questions: does a thing exist independent of the perceiver? That is the old philosophical question that has been fought over for about 5,000 years. In other words does the sound exist without anyone hearing? that sort of thing. One could say that sound exists without me hearing it but then is it sound or vibration or whatever?

Hilton: In trying to relate General Semantics to psychosynthesis, to psychotherapy, would you, Dr. Wolf, care to say if and how General Semantics has helped you in handling your patients?

Wolf: Mainly in bringing expression down to the lowest level of abstraction where it can have the least misunderstanding or distortion - unless I want to arouse or want to make a person uneasy; in other words if I want to break down rigidity, then I use it down here at high levels of abstraction. Once I know that I am doing this I can theoretically handle it. I may not succeed every time but this would be the way. If I have a person under hypnosis I want to talk way up here (pointed to the level of the object on the blackboard. Ed.) and see where we have a common denominator so that there can be no misunderstanding. If, however, I want to produce deliberately some kind of inner feeling - not in hypnosis but in an ordinary waking state - I use it down here.

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