

Applied Epistemology and Fundamental Principles of General Semantics

This is not *That*

Applied Epistemology

Do you know what you do?

Do you do what you know?

This is not *That*

Applied Epistemology

quoting Sir Norman Angell (1942)

If the world has nearly destroyed itself, it is not from lack of knowledge in the sense that we lack the knowledge to cure cancer or release atomic energy, but is due to the fact that the mass of men have not applied to public policy knowledge which they already possess ... If this is true ... then no education which consists mainly in the dissemination of "knowledge" can save us. If men can disregard in their policies the facts they already know, they can just as easily disregard new facts which they do not at present know.

What is needed is the development in men of that particular type of skill which will enable them to make social use of knowledge already in their possession; enable them to ***apply*** simple, sometimes self-evident, truths to the guidance of their common life.

This is not *That*

Applied Epistemology

quoting Aldous Huxley (1963)

A culture cannot be discriminatingly accepted, much less be modified, except by persons who have seen through it—by persons who have cut holes in the confining stockade of verbalized symbols and so are able to look at the world and, by reflection, at themselves, in a new and relatively unprejudiced way. Such persons are not merely born; they must also be made. But how?

In the field of formal education, what the would-be hole cutter needs is knowledge; knowledge of the past and present history of cultures in all their fantastic variety, and knowledge about the nature and limitations, the uses and abuses, of language.

(continued)

Applied Epistemology

quoting Aldous Huxley (1963)

(continuing)

A man who knows that there have been many cultures, and that each culture claims to be the best and truest of all, will find it hard to take too seriously the boastings and dogmatizings of his own tradition. Similarly, a man who knows how symbols are related to experience, and who ***practices*** the kind of linguistic self-control taught by the exponents of General Semantics, is unlikely to take too seriously the absurd or dangerous nonsense that, within every culture, passes for philosophy, practical wisdom and political argument.

This is not *That*

Fundamental Principles

1. Human abilities to perceive and sense what goes on in their continually-changing environments are **limited** (evolution, genes, physics, etc.).

- o macroscopic
- o microscopic
- o sub-microscopic
- o cosmologic

We *abstract* sensory inputs as we *construct* our perceptions, experiences, etc.

Fundamental Principles

2. Language(s) shape, influence, affect, etc., how a given culture constructs the 'realities' of that culture's experiences, behavioral norms, world view, etc. (Sapir, Whorf)

Fundamental Principles

3. Humans have the ability to respond *conditionally* to non-verbal and symbolic stimuli.

When we don't respond conditionally, we copy animals (Pavlov's dog). We allow the stimulus to dictate the response, or to use Korzybski's term, we *identify*.

Fundamental Principles

4. Our ability to achieve “maximum humanness” and evolve to our human potential is a function of how accurately our language-behaviors (what we **do**) reflect and are consistent with what we **know**.

Our verbal ‘maps’ ought to be congruent and consistent with the realities of our non-verbal ‘territories’.

Summary

- ▶ Know what you do; Do what you know.
- ▶ We abstract limited sensory data from our environment; we experience incompletely.
- ▶ Our language shapes our world view and influences our experiences.
- ▶ We can respond conditionally to events.
- ▶ Our verbal 'maps' ought to be structured consistently with the 'territory' of experiences