

## Challenging Culturally-Expected Ways of Thinking

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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 initiators might 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., has 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, scientific, 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 resented 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://dfwecs.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 level of self-consciousness and self-evaluation, that 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 guideline. 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.