

Gregory Bateson "Mind and Nature" Dutton, N.Y. 1979  
Ch. II EVERY SCHOOLBOY KNOWS ...

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2. THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY,  
AND THE NAME IS NOT THE THING NAMED

This principle, made famous by Alfred Korzybski, strikes at many levels. It reminds us in a general way that when we think of coconuts or pigs, there are no coconuts or pigs in the brain. But in a more abstract way, Korzybski's statement asserts that in all thought or perception or communication about perception, there is a transformation, a coding, between the report and the thing reported, the *Ding an sich*. Above all, the relation between the report and that mysterious thing reported tends to have the nature of a classification, an assignment of the thing to a class. Naming is always classifying, and mapping is essentially the same as naming.

Korzybski was, on the whole, speaking as a philosopher, attempting to persuade people to discipline their manner of thinking. But he could not win. When we come to apply his dictum to the natural history of human mental process, the matter is not quite so simple. The distinction between the name and the thing named or the map and the territory is perhaps really made only by the dominant hemisphere of the brain. The symbolic and affective hemisphere, normally on the right-hand side, is probably unable to distinguish name from thing named. It is certainly not concerned with this sort of distinction. It therefore happens that certain nonrational types of behavior are necessarily present in human life. We do, in fact, have two hemispheres; and we cannot operate somewhat differently from the other, and we cannot get away from the tangles that that difference proposes.

For example, with the dominant hemisphere, we can regard such a thing as a flag as a sort of name of the country or organization that it represents. But the right hemisphere does not draw this distinction and regards the flag as sacramentally identical with what it represents. So "Old Glory" is the United States. If somebody steps on it, the response may be rage. And this rage will not be diminished by an explanation of map-territory relations. (After all, the man who tramples the flag is equally identify it with that for which it stands.) There is always and necessarily be a large number of situations in which the response is not guided by the logical distinction between the name and the thing named.