

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION 1958

A quarter of a century has now elapsed since the first edition of Alfred Korzybski's principal work, *Science and Sanity*, appeared. The second edition was published in 1941 and the third was prepared in 1948, two years before the author's death. Although the second and third editions provided clarification and amplification of certain aspects of the non-aristotelian orientation originally proposed by the author, and while they cited important new data illustrating the rewards accruing to certain fields of human endeavor (e.g., psychotherapy) in consequence of the utilization of the orientations earnestly espoused by him, they represented no important departures from the first edition in respect of basic principles at theoretic and pragmatic levels. Nor, in serious retrospection, did any such appear to have been indicated.

Considering that the author himself, in applying the formulation of 'the self-reflexive map' to his own work, asserted on more than one occasion that perceptible revisions of his formulations must be anticipated and that such would very likely prove fairly compelling within a period estimated at twenty-five years, it comes as something of a surprise that as the 1958 reprinting of *Science and Sanity* goes to press no major alterations seem as yet to be required. In this modern world of rapid change—in which Man has acquired information regarding the intra- and extra-organic realms of his Universe at an unprecedented exponential rate; in which the Atomic Age has come into actual being; in which conquests of space that were but fanciful dreams only yesteryear have become astonishing realities; in which new specialties, bridging freely across the gaps of the unknown between conventional scientific disciplines, have sprung into life and become full-fledged within a matter of months; and in which far-seeing men of good will have organized their endeavors to unify the sciences, arts and humanitarian pursuits-at-large and appear as never before determined (despite recalcitrant and reactionary private interests) to implement a One World such as might befit the dignity of humanity in its manhood—the continuing substantiality of Korzybski's 1933 formulations must be regarded as a tribute to his vision and integrative genius. Now that we are able to stand a little apart from historical developments and view his life's work in some perspective, it can hardly be doubted that he grasped, as few had done before him and certainly none had so systematically and comprehensively treated, the abiding significance of linguistic habits and the communicative processes-

in-general to all of Man's thinking-and-doing, from his loftiest metaphysical, epistemological and mathematical efforts to the most casual, trivial and mundane performances of his everyday living.

Like a skillful diagnostician, Korzybski penetrated deeply into the etiologic and pathologic substrates of what he perceived to be the more serious deterrents to current human endeavors and there succeeded in identifying certain grave strictures imposed upon Man's creative potentials and problem-solving proclivities by one of the *least suspected* of all possible agencies, namely, the academically-revered and ubiquitously exercised aristotelian formulations of logic. This diagnostic act was, of course, the analogical equivalent of finding a positive Wasserman reaction in the blood serum of some long honored and beloved patriarch. Its disclosure promised and, in point of fact, proved to be no more popular. In this sense, Korzybski's position was wholly comparable to that of Copernicus and Galileo, who had been impelled by their private inquiries during the early Renaissance to challenge the popular ptolemaic cosmology and aristotelian mechanics of their day. It required an uncommon personal integrity, an unusual brand of courage and a plenum of physical energy to spell out the overt and covert effects produced by these widely-pervading, pathologic neuro-semantic processes in the community of humans. Korzybski was, as we now know, quite up to this formidable task.

To have made the diagnosis constituted in itself an intellectual triumph. But Korzybski did more than this. His analyses enabled him to write effective prescriptions for both the prevention and treatment of the disorders he encountered round about and within the community of humans. These disorders, including cultural and institutional as well as personal misevaluations and delusions, he regarded as essentially those of inept semantic reactions. They were for him the unmistakable marks of un-sanity, however 'normal' they might appear to be in a statistical sense.

The side-effects of Korzybski's formulations were hardly less significant than the prophylactic and therapeutic devices engendered by them. Among other things, they cast much needed light on the psychology of perception, child psychology, education, the cultural theories of modern anthropology, scientific method and operational ethics. As of the time of writing this introduction, a revolution in neurology, psychology, psychiatry and related disciplines, comparable in every way to that which broke upon the discipline of physics in the early years of the present century, appears both imminent and inevitable. The stirrings toward such appear to have been derived largely from a general semantic orientation, which has sufficiently influenced advanced investigators in

these areas to make its impact apparent in their writings and in the character of their researches. The old dichotomies which have been for, lo ! these many years the bed-rock terms of intellectual discourse, to which others referred and from which they derived their meanings—e.g., mental and physical, conscious and unconscious, thought and speech, structure and function, intellect and emotion, heredity and environment, organic and functional, reality and unreality, male and female, autonomic and cerebrospinal, pyramidal and extrapyramidal, motor and sensory, idiopathic and symptomatic, voluntary and involuntary, etc.—have exhibited visible signs of disintegration. New and operationally verifiable formulations are beginning to emerge in their place and field theory, commensurate with that now being developed in the realm of nuclear physics, begins to accommodate data heretofore considered unconnected. Nowhere is it more apparent than in neurology, psychology and closely related disciplines that ‘the word is not the thing.’

It would be a mistake, of course, for the reader to suppose that, because no major alterations in or additions to Korzybski’s methodologic and applied formulations have appeared necessary up to the present, his students and others who find his views empathetic with their own embrace the inordinate faith that such will not eventually be required. Quite to the contrary. They are persuaded that modifications, major as well as minor, must come as newly acquired information necessitates; and they have deliberately provided for them. From its very inception, the discipline of general semantics has been such as to attract persons possessing high intellectual integrity, independence from orthodox commitments, and agnostic, disinterested and critical inclinations. On the whole, they have been persons little impressed with intellectual authority immanent within any individual or body of individuals. For them, authority reposes not in any omniscient or omnipresent messiah, but solely in the dependability of the predictive content of propositions made with reference to the non-verbal happenings in this universe. They apply this basic rubric as readily to korzybskian doctrine as to all other abstract formulations and theories and, like good scientists, they are prepared to cast them off precisely as soon as eventualities reveal them to be incompetent, i.e., lacking in reliable predictive content. This circumstance in itself should abrogate once and for all the reckless charges sometimes made by ill-informed critics that general semantics is but one more of a long succession of cults, having its divine master, its disciples, a bible, its own mumbo-jumbo and ceremonial rites. For, if there is any one denominator that can be regarded as common to all such cults, it is the self-sealing character of their dogmas, which *a priori* must stand as

eternal verities, regardless of the advent of incompatible experiences. In antithetic contrast, general semanticists are fully sensible of the man-fashioned origin of general semantics and have taken pains to keep its structure open-ended. Far from being inclined to repel changes that appear to menace the make-up of general semantics, they actively anticipate them and are prepared to foster those that seem to promise better predictions, better survival and better adaptation to the vicissitudes of this earthly habitat.

One cannot help but be aware, in 1958, that there is far less suspicion and misgiving among intellectuals concerning general semantics and general semanticists than prevailed ten and twenty years ago. Indeed, a certain receptivity is noticeable. The term 'semantics' itself is now frequently heard on the radio, TV and the public speaking platform and it appears almost as frequently in the public print. It has even found a recent 'spot' in a Hollywood movie and it gives some promise of becoming an integral part of our household jargon. This in no sense means that all such users of the term have familiarized themselves with the restricted meaning of the term 'semantics,' much less that they have internalized the evaluative implications and guiding principles of action subsumed under general semantics. A comparable circumstance obtains, of course, in the layman's use of other terms, such as 'electronics.'

But more palpable gains than these can be counted. We have alluded to some of these as they bear on psychology, anthropology and the medical sciences. The years since the close of World War II have similarly witnessed the access of general semantics not only to academic curricula of the primary, secondary and collegiate levels of the North and South American continents, parts of Western Europe, Britain, Australia and Japan, but to the busy realms of commerce, industry and transportation: of military organization and civil administration; of law, engineering, sociology, economics and religion. These constitute no negligible extensions of general semantics into the world of 'practical' affairs. Large business enterprises, looking toward the improvement of intra- and extra-mural relations, more satisfying resolutions of the complicated problems that arise between labor and management, and the enhancement of service to their immediate constituents and fellow men in general have found it rewarding, in many instances, to reorganize their entire structure so as to assure the incorporation of general semantic formulations. Several organizations now in existence make it their sole business to advise and provide help in the implementation of such changes. The core of their prescriptions consists in the appropriate application of general semantics. It is becoming a routine for the high and intermediate level executives of

certain industries, advertising agencies, banking establishments and the like to retreat for several days at a time while they receive intensive instruction and participate in seminar-workshops designed to indoctrinate them with the principles of general semantics. Comparable courses of instruction have been provided within recent years for the officers of the U.S. Air Academy, the traffic officers of the Chicago Police Department and the sales forces of several large pharmaceutical and biochemical houses. These innovations in business procedure entail, of course, enormous outlays of time, energy and money. They must in time pay perceptible dividends or suffer abandonment. That they are steadily on the increase appears to offer eloquent testimony of their effectiveness.

Other evidences of the growth and widening sphere of influence can be pointed to. Membership in the two major organizations concerned with the development, teaching and utilization of general semantics, namely, the Institute of General Semantics located at Lakeville, Connecticut and the International Society for General Semantics, with its central office at Chicago, has slowly but steadily increased over the years and, gratifyingly, has generally avoided the 'lunatic fringe' that appears ever ready to attach itself to convenient nuclei. The two current publications of these organizations, the *General Semantics Bulletin* and *ETC.: A Review of General Semantics*, continue to provide cogent original articles and synopses of progress in the field. Their subscription lists now include libraries scattered over the entire globe.

In 1949, the Third American Congress on General Semantics was held at the University of Denver. This turned out to be the last occasion at which Alfred Korzybski made a public appearance. During these stimulating sessions he had the satisfaction of hearing numerous reports of investigations by his former students and others who had profited roundly from their familiarity with the non-aristotelian formulations. Many of these papers, representing a wide and eclectic coverage of human interests, were subsequently published in the *General Semantics Bulletin*. Two additional conferences of national scope have been held in the interim—one in Chicago in 1951 and another in St. Louis in 1954. Another conference of international scope is planned for August, 1958. Meanwhile, numerous sectional conferences have been held in various cities each year and the number of courses sought and offered in general semantics is definitely on the increase.

All in all, then, a healthy state of affairs appears to prevail in respect of general semantics. The impact of Korzybski's work on Western culture is now unmistakable and there is every reason to be optimistic that his precepts will be read by ever-widening circles of serious students

and that the latter, in their turn, must deeply influence generations of students yet to come. It remains to be seen what effects the regular implementation of these precepts will bring to mankind. Many of us are convinced that they will prove highly salutary.

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE, 1958

In the second edition of this book, published in 1941, a short list of reprints and monographs available at the institute of General Semantics was included—almost the only literature then on general semantics since *Science and Sanity* first appeared. (See page lxxxvi in this volume.) Since that date the number of books, papers, and reviews has grown profusely, and no attempt is made here to record them fully.

‘The principal articles in the field have appeared in *Papers From the Second American Congress on General Semantics*, M. Kendig, Editor (1943), in the *General Semantics Bulletin* and other materials published by the Institute for its Members, and in *ETC.: A Review of General Semantics*, the official organ of the International Society for General Semantics.

The *General Semantics Bulletin*, founded and edited by M. Kendig, is the official journal of the Institute of General Semantics, published since 1949 ‘for information and inter-communication among workers in the non-aristotelian discipline formulated by Alfred Korzybski.’ It contains papers on many aspects of general semantics, theoretical and practical, as well as reports, discussions, news, book comments, etc. Numbers One & Two through Eighteen & Nineteen have been issued to date.

Some of the articles distributed by the Institute, 1947-1949, previous to the founding of the *Bulletin* are listed below:

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— Understanding of Human Potentialities, Key to Dealing with Soviet Union, 1948. Summary of an address, and introduction by Stuart Chase.

— General Semantics: Toward a New General System of Evaluation and Predictability in Solving Human Problems. *American People’s Encyclopedia*, 1949 edition.

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KORZYBSKI, ALFRED, The Role of Language in the Perceptual Processes, Chapter 7 in *Perception: An Approach to Personality* by Robert R. Blake and Glenn V. Ramsey, Ronald Press, 1951.

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For books, published and in preparation, see International Non-aristotelian Library list opposite the title page.

Current lists of publications in the field of general semantics are available from the Institute of General Semantics, 163 Engle Street, Englewood, NJ 07631. Telephone 201-568-0551. Fax 201-569-1793.