

General Semantics Guides Toward Better Futures

I start with quotes from two philosophers: One from Bernard Lonergan S.J. and the other from William James. Bernard Lonergan wrote this about “method”. “A method is a set of directives that serve to guide a process toward a result”. William James wrote: “Philosophy is an unreasonably stubborn effort to think clearly”. We can apply these two time-binding gems to general semantics in this manner: General Semantics provides us with a set of time-binding directives that we can use as guides to clarify our thinking and help us create better futures.

Towards Better Futures

Korzybski was concerned for the sanity of the human race. In his general semantics theory, he predicts better futures for the human race through the applications of “general semantics time-binding generalized science, and mathematics methods and approaches” in all areas of our individual lives and fields of activities—intrapersonal-cultural-educational-political-economic-scientific-national-international. ‘Creating’ better futures involves a vision, a heuristic method, and action. In Korzybski’s general semantics we find principles and procedures (the generalizations) we can use as guides (heuristic method) to help us work towards achieving (action) better futures (vision) for ourselves, and others. To the extent we are individually successful in applying general semantics in all areas of our life, his vision of possible better futures for ourselves and the race might be realized.

Although Korzybski did not explicitly mention this (as far as I know), general semantics as a system, offers not only a theory of sanity, a theory of values, a theory of psychotherapy, a theory of evaluation, and a theory of meanings, but also provides us with the foundations for a “theory of creativity and critical thinking”. In applying the principles modified by “consciousness of abstracting”, we are doing time-binding improvement consciously and deliberately. And becoming more conscious of this natural--but usually unconscious human ability—with this higher level of awareness of our time-binding ability, we are able to use it to greater advantages.” (BTW: General semantics principles, devices, and procedures as outlined in “Science And Sanity”, were formulated as “elaborations of the time-binding mechanism”.) See Science And Sanity Page 52)

Our futures are functions of our presents. From moment to moment, in our ‘thinking’, attitudes, relationships, and behavior, we are laying the foundations for our futures: We don’t know what kind of futures—but we can enormously increase the possibilities for realizing better futures for ourselves and possibly others. We do this through rigorously and relentlessly applying general semantics standards to critically creatively modify-change present ‘behaviors’ and establish foundations for realizing better futures. We can through time-binding—learning from past achievements and mistakes, improve our present ‘behaviors’. We find in the general semantics time-binding principles and methods including “non-allness, non-identity, relative invariance under transformation, non-elementalism, consciousness of abstracting and others”, a foundation for “a

theory of creativity and critical thinking”, and also guides for improving our thinking, attitudes, relationships and behaviors.

We will more likely realize better futures by applying consciousness of abstracting principles to help us modify, improve and expand: the way we look at things, the way we listen, the way we experience, the meanings we give and what we believe; the way we interpret what we see, read, and hear; the understandings we arrive at; the way we think and talk about things, and the values we hold. In applying general semantics time-binding principles and becoming more critically creative: We do some different things, and we do many things differently. We are more likely to realize better futures by creatively and critically doing many things in ways different from the ways we have been culturally conditioned and are expected to behave. This takes much courage--since in applying these principles, we change the way we relate with ourselves, with others, and with our environments.

From Science And Sanity

The following are comments, predictions, suggestions, etc. that I have selected from Science And Sanity, Fifth Edition, and “Manhood of Humanity” that I think illustrate Korzybski’s concern for better futures for you, me, and possibly the race.

At present I am chiefly concerned to drive home the fact that it is the great *disparity* between the rapid progress of the natural and technological sciences on the one hand and the slow progress of the metaphysical, co-called social “sciences” on the other hand, that sooner or later so disturbs the equilibrium of human affairs as to result periodically in those cataclysms which we call insurrections, revolutions, and wars. Manhood of Humanity Page 22

Because we are human beings we are all of us interested in what we call progress—progress in law, in government, in jurisprudence, in ethics, in philosophy, in the natural sciences, in economics, in the fine arts, in the practical arts, in the production and distribution of wealth, in all affairs affecting the welfare of mankind. It is a fact that all these great matters are interdependent and interlocking; it is therefore a fact of the utmost importance that progress in each of the cardinal matters must keep abreast of progress in the other cardinal matters in order to keep a just equilibrium, a proper balance, and so to maintain the integrity and continued prosperity of the whole complex body of our social life;
Manhood of Humanity page 15

Sanity means *adjustment*, and without the minimum of the best structural knowledge of each date concerning this world, such adjustment is impossible. Science And Sanity, Page 727

..mankind represents an interdependent time-binding class of life, and 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.” Science And Sanity, Page 557

In general semantics we are concerned with the *sanity* of the race, including particular methods of prevention; eliminating from home, elementary, and higher education inadequate aristotelian types of evaluation, which too often lead to the *un-sanity* of the race and building up for the first time a positive theory of sanity, as a workable non-aristotelian *system*.Science And Sanity, Page lxxxi

Our rulers: politicians, ‘diplomats’, bankers, priests, of every description, economists, lawyers, etc., and the majority of teachers remain at present largely or entirely ignorant of modern science, scientific methods, structural linguistic and semantics issues of 1933, and they also lack an essential historical and anthropological background, without which a sane orientation is impossible.... As a result a conflict is created and maintained between the advance of science affecting conditions of actual life and the orientation of our rulers, which often remain antiquated by centuries, or one or two thousand years. The present world conditions are in chaos; ...Few of us at present realize that, as long as such ignorance of our rulers prevails, *no solution of our human problems is possible*. Sanity And Sanity, Page xcii

Depending on science for more and better killing *machines* is certainly not the solution for *human* problems, culture and civilization. Science And Sanity, Page lxxix

If we live in 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 fundamentally primitive ‘civilization’ in the midst of great technical achievements. Science And Sanity, Page 727

As we learned lately, not only human achievements, but also human disasters, are mostly interrelated and international, and are becoming more so every year. Obviously with Aristotelian narrowness, selfishness, shortsightedness, infantilism, commercialism, militarism, nationalism, etc., rampant, mankind, to prevent further major Aristotelian disasters, would have to produce a special international body which would co-ordinate various structural achievements, strivings, etc., formulate and inform the great masses of the modern scientific Non-Aristotelian standards of evaluation. Science And Sanity, Page 558

Under modern conditions, which change rather rapidly nowadays, obviously, some relations between humans alter, and so the institutions must be revised. Science And Sanity, Page 285

Through training in the consciousness of abstracting we become aware that characteristics are left out in the process of abstracting by our nervous systems, and so we become conscious of the possibility that new factors may arise at any time which would necessitate a change in our generalizations. Science And Sanity, Page lxiii

We read unconsciously into the world the structure of the language we use. Science And Sanity, Page 60

To achieve adjustment and sanity and the conditions which follow from them, we must study structural characteristics of this world *first*, and, then only, build languages of similar structure instead of habitually ascribing to the world the primitive structure of our language. All our

doctrines, institutions, etc. depend on verbal arguments. If these arguments are conducted in a language of wrong and unnatural structure, our doctrines and institutions must reflect that linguistic structure, and inevitably lead to disasters. Science And Sanity, Page 59

Since words *are not* the things we speak about, the study of linguistic structure become a most important research method. The more languages (theories) we have for analysis and structural comparison, the more glimpses do we get at the structure of the world.... If we want to progress in any line of human endeavor, this progress is always dependent on the language we use, since what we call 'progress' is always a co-operative affair and therefore dependent on means of communications and languages. Science And Sanity, Page 725

It is not generally realized that with human progress, the complexities and difficulties in the world increase following an exponential function of 'time', with indefinitely accelerating accelerations. I am deeply convinced that these problems cannot be solved at all unless we boldly search for and revise our antiquated notions about the 'nature of man' and apply modern extensional methods toward their solution. Science And Sanity, Page xxxv

If we teach our children, whose nervous systems are not physically finished at birth, doctrines structurally belonging to entirely different epochs of human development, we ought not to wonder that semantic harm is done. Science And Sanity, Page 149

Our rulers, who rule our symbols, and so rule a symbolic class of life, impose their own infantilism on our institutions, educational methods, and doctrines. This leads to nervous maladjustment of the incoming generations which, being born into, are forced to develop under the un-natural (for man) semantic conditions imposed on them. In turn, they produce leaders afflicted with the old animalistic limitations. The vicious circle is completed; it results in a general state of human un-sanity, reflected in our institutions. And so it goes, on and on. Science And Sanity, Page 41

We are constantly producing more and more complex conditions of life, man made, man-invented, and deceptive for the non-prepared.In spite of inventions and discoveries of science, which are *human* achievements, we still preserve *animalistic* systems and doctrines which shape our semantic reactions. Hence, life becomes more strained and increasingly more unhappy, thereby multiplying the number of nervous break-downs. Science And Sanity Page 459

The experimental development of science and civilization invariably involves more and more refined discriminations. Science And Sanity, Page xcvi

I must stress that I give no panaceas, but experience shows that when the methods of general semantics are *applied*, the results are usually beneficial, whether in law, medicine, business, etc., education on all levels, or personal inter-relationships, be they in family, national, or international fields. If they are not applied, but merely talked about, no result can be expected. Science And Sanity Page xxxi