

No One Saw It coming? Korzybski's Concerns, Predictions, and Time-binding Suggestions

Technology in its diverse expressions is democratizing our human interactions at personal, societal, and international levels. This is going on not just in the usual political sense of democracy, but by making more available to the masses what historically was available to kings, noblemen, lords, tyrants, dictators, political regimes, the well-to do, and so forth. Unlike earlier times, more and more individuals have access to sources of information (through books, magazines, various communication devices, computers, satellites, etc.), diverse means of conveyance, guns, bombs, missiles, and so on.

Unfortunately, this rapid democratization in terms of 'speed of light' accessibility to more and more information, misinformation, and missed information, is not balanced by a comparative increase or improvement in critical and creative thinking based on time-binding consciousness and practice. Human relationships at many levels seem to be directed more towards 'unsane' behaviors than towards achieving more desirable and satisfying interactions. Words and symbols emerged before we understood the tremendous power of words and symbols to affect our relationships. Similarly, technology emerged and expanded faster than we are learning to manage our differences, diversities, and conflicts. With technology, we are able to communicate with each other across thousands of miles in a few seconds...And we are also able to drop bombs on each other from far away. It seems to me we have not to any noticeable or significant degree use technology to re-view and revise many of our beliefs and practices based on habitual ways of thinking.

In brief: Technology has expanded and accelerated the democratization of power—power as the ability (for 'good' or 'bad') to produce an effect, to influence, to initiate and accelerate change, to produce things, etc.

Recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain--and who knows where next--present us with powerful examples of the use of computers and cell phones to initiate what might turn out to be a new development in world order (or disorder). Although many experts and others exclaimed that "No one saw this coming", I believe that Korzybski (if alive) and serious student-practitioners of general semantics, not only expect these upheavals but also predict there will be many more to come: Many of our unexamined, and unrevised primitive beliefs; our social, political, economic, religious, legal, and other institutions which are based on, and operate following these primitive and habitual ways of thinking, and our poor appreciation of the power of language, guarantee that there will be more and more upheavals. This, despite Einstein's caution that: 'We cannot solve our human problems using the same kind of thinking that produced them in the first place'.

Below are selections related to some of Korzybski's concerns, predictions, and time-binding suggestions addressing past, present, and highly possible future upheavals. These were presented in his books "Science and Sanity" (1933) and "Manhood of Humanity" (1921) outlining the system "general semantics".

Selections from “Science And Sanity” (5th. Ed.), and “Manhood Of Humanity”

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

Technically we are very advanced, but the elementalistic premises underlying our human relations, practically since Aristotle, have not changed at all....It turns out that in the structure of our languages, methods, ‘habits of thought’, orientations, etc., we preserve delusional psychopathological factors....This ‘emery’ in the nervous system I call identification. It involves deeply rooted ‘principles’ which are invariably false to facts and so our orientations based on them cannot lead to adjustment and sanity. Science And Sanity, page xc

One of the great difficulties facing the world today is the passing from one historical era to another. Such passing, as history shows, have always been painful, and pregnant with consequences....Now we are witnessing the struggles of ‘democracies’ with ‘totalitarian states’,....In all these transitions it took one or more generations before the upheaval subsided and an adjustment was made to the new conditions. Science And Sanity, page xlix

...the passing from era to another is usually so difficult and so painful. The new involves new semantic reactions, while as a rule, the older generations have enforced their systems, and through them, by means of controlled education and linguistic structure and habits, the old semantic reactions. This, the younger generation, *always* having more racial experience, cannot accept, so that revolutions, scientific or otherwise, happen, and, when successful, the new system are imposed on the older generation without the older generation’s changing their semantic reactions. All of which is painful to all concerned. Science And Sanity, page 28

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The progress of science is due in the main to scientific methods and linguistic revisions, and so the new facts discovered by such methods cannot be properly utilized by antiquated psycho-logical orientations and languages. Science And Sanity xciii

Science and mathematics show the working of the 'human mind' at its best. Accordingly, we can learn from science and mathematics how this 'human mind' should work *to be at its best*. Science And Sanity, page 728

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

Science And Sanity, Manhood Of Hamanity, and other books on general semantics are available from The Institute of General Semantics.

For more on general semantics contact The Institute of General Semantics and visit <miltondawes.com>