

J. SAMUEL BOIS--AN APPRECIATION

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DR. J. SAMUEL BOIS is clearly, I think, the leading theoretician in general semantics today, as well as a valuable and exciting explorer of how to apply it.

Bois—it's pronounced "bwa"—doesn't fall into any simple category. He's neither an "orthodox Korzybskian" nor "merely a popularizer," whatever those terms might mean. He builds on Korzybski's foundations and develops insights that I find extremely useful.

People in general semantics often have unusually diverse backgrounds, but few can match Sam Bois. He started his career in his native Quebec as a Catholic priest. As a worker-priest, he organized labor unions and founded a Catholic weekly which is still in existence. Then, as a missionary, he worked with Mexicans and Indians in California. But 14 years as a priest changed Sam Bois, and didn't change the church; he was arraigned and condemned before the Holy Office in Rome, subjected to what he calls "a latter-day Inquisition," and finally released from the church.

He returned to college, got a Ph.D. in psychology at McGill in Montreal, and joined with another psychologist in the first psychological consulting service in Canada. During that time he wrote a monthly column for a medical journal, a weekly column for a literary and political paper, and three books in French. Then, during World War II, he served as a lieutenant colonel in charge of research and information at National Defense Headquarters in Ottawa.

In 1939 he "discovered" general semantics, and when he

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went into industrial psychology after the war, he adapted many semantics ideas into that field, and he developed a management training program called Executive Methods which he conducted in many large cities. In 1956 he "retired" and moved to Southern California, where he serves as director of research and education at Viewpoints Institute, a center for general semantics study in Los Angeles, and conducts classes and workshops there and at the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Southern California.

Bois's major single contribution surely must be his Semantic Reactor diagram, with its four ellipses covering the four kinds of activities of an organism—thinking (those involving words or symbols), feeling (those involving emotions), moving (body movement and muscle patterns), and electro-chemical (observed mostly through scientific instruments). These all affect one another as well as interacting with the environment around them, with a similar structure for the past and a similar structure for expectations of the future also affecting the rest of the model. This was published in his 1957 *Explorations in Awareness*.

Bois continued to refine the concept, and in his 1966 *The Art of Awareness* he revised the diagram to make the four ellipses more overlapping, to suggest more clearly the way each part of the organism effects every other part. Then he took Korzybski's Structural Differential, gave the various levels new names which seem to make them easier to understand, and put miniature Semantic Reactor diagrams (which I like to call "Sam Bois helicopters") between levels. The result is a general model which not only demonstrates graphically the abstraction process but points up more clearly the way each person filters each level through his own nervous system to make the abstractions.

His most recent publication, the 1968 "mini-book" *Communication as Creative Experience*, sums up Bois's work in terms of practical applications for the average person in communicating. Another book, *Breeds of Men*, will appear in 1970.

PERSONALLY, if I had to pick out a single page of Bois's writing as the most useful, I'd choose page 24 of *Communication as Creative Experience*, where he lists seven ways of communicating effectively. I see Bois here as not only distilling the practical application of general semantics to communication, but offering a strong challenge to us as semanticists, and incidentally demonstrating his position in the growing edge of general semantics development.

Some of his suggestions are similar to those made by other writers, although Bois does put them in such a way as to lend a sort of inevitability, a sort of "natural sense," to them. He suggests we accept the person we're trying to communicate with as he is, and that we encourage him to express himself freely. He suggests, as I understand him, that we avoid both the "let's stick to the problem" and the "I want to convince you" hangups.

But while other general semanticists advocate use of a "to me" or "in my opinion" tossed somewhere in your statement of opinion, Bois sees this as a half-way measure. The honest and accurate way, as I read Bois, is to state your feelings with "I" as the subject, not with "in my opinion" as a kind of afterthought. Using "I" also helps avoid the questionable use of "is."

I find this suggestion the real blockbuster: "Do not evaluate critically the other person's views against your own as the standard of truth and wisdom, but take his views as a tentative standard against which you re-examine and re-evaluate your own opinions and feelings."

Wow! Not only let other statements into your organism uncritically, but actually put them in that cherished spot in the heart of your own belief system, as a way of testing what you believe!

I think this is tremendous, although certainly not an easy thing to do. But it illustrates the kind of challenge that Sam Bois puts down for us and the reason why I find his ideas so exciting.