

ON UPDATING AN OPEN-ENDED SYSTEM

A NOTE BY M. KENDIG,* MARCH 1971

Much has been *added* to 'knowledge' in most fields since Korzybski wrote *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* and his writings thereafter. Broadly speaking this added knowledge has merely been added not synthesized nor integrated even in some highly specialized branches of various fields. The original text of *Science and Sanity* was written *inductively* based on 1933 physico-mathematic, psycho-neurological sciences. The introduction to the Second Edition and other later writings (1934-1950) are basically of a *deductive* nature.¹

Science and Sanity can best be *updated* by addenda in the form of monographs by specialists in the various fields who, of course, should have undertaken training themselves in non-aristotelian methodology.² Since it is based on *negative* premises, the non-aristotelian system formulated and methodized by Korzybski can be best characterized as an *open-ended* system. Obviously 'discoveries'³ of all sorts in 'the territory' must be mapped in some sort of symbolism — the human dimension — linguistic, mathematical, etc. formulations, even artifacts, models, etc. The principles of non-elementalism, dimensionality, multi-ordinal abstracting, non-identity, non-allness, self-reflexiveness, and use of the extensional devices would still hold, even if some entirely different (structurally) new 'world picture' should come about — as different as the 'picture drawn' by the general theory of relativity — the new quantum mechanics, etc. was/is from the newtonian 'world picture'.

This open-ended character of the korzybskian discipline has largely escaped attention. I have observed that the less well trained in the discipline, the more some persons write/say Korzybski is outdated, must be revised.⁴ I've come to feel that Korzybski overdid his modesty — *not* in insisting on the limited nature of his work — limited to the premises which I consider most important — but in saying the discipline would soon be superseded. 'Supersede' seems a badly chosen

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word. Many other non-aristotelian systems may be formulated — as, for example, have been the several non-euclidean geometrics. (I was going to mention the calculus — integral, vector, tensor, each useful for different purposes, but I don't feel the analogy quite fits.)

A point that seems to bother many students I've met: We speak about 'the territory' usually as the non-verbal goings-on at 'silent levels' or orders of abstractions; what we call an 'apple', 'the moon', 'our pain', etc. It sometimes seems necessary to rub our noses in the 'fact' that the black marks I make on this paper, the 'sounds' I hear when you speak, become 'the territory' and any thing we say/write about them represent different orders of abstractions. The word 'apple' read or said becomes just as much a territory as the 'unspeakables' we can point to.⁵ So it is when we consider and talk about a so-called theory. What we say is *not* the formulation we are talking about. Obvious, of course, but probably confusing. (A case of self-reflexiveness — 'map of the map of the map, etc.')

ADDENDUM (June 1971)

After I had finished this note I received a letter happily apropos of what I have written. I quote from it below with the permission of the writer, Russell Meyers MD. (He was formerly professor of surgery and Chairman of the Division of Neurosurgery, Medical School, University of Iowa, (1947-1963), presently Chief of Neurology, Williamson Appalachian Regional Hospital, Williamson, West Virginia. Dr. Meyers lectured for many of the seminar-workshops of the Institute of General Semantics while I was director, 1950-1965.)

In preparation for the five weeks course in general semantics I shall run at the University of Wyoming this summer [1971], I have just re-read *Science and Sanity* (my 8th run) and am so deeply impressed with it as to now say, without reservation, that, disregarding its rhetoric (in the main, its repetitious statements), it is far and away the most profound, insightful and globally significant book I have ever read.

With some knowledge of the interim developments of science and of the sociopolitical events that have materialized since 1933, I can say in retrospect that any modifications that might now have to be made in the original text would be trivial, mainly technological supplements; none *in principle* ("structure" — as-function). A. K. has proved far more a prophet than he would ever have allowed himself to fancy. What a tremendous breadth and depth of insight, analytic and synthetic achievement!

FOOTNOTES

1. Using the words 'induction' and 'deduction' I feel uncomfortable lest they be taken absolutistically as polarities. This I have observed many readers do. Even some who've studied Korzybski do not seem aware of 'overlaps': Obviously, one does not collect data at random in an inductive approach, rather in terms of some hypotheses, etc., no matter how nebulous. Perhaps only in mathematics could one claim to exhibit the 'purely' deductive. See 'What I Believe,' *Manhood of Humanity*, 2nd ed., 1950, xliii-xliv. This from Korzybski may at first glance not seem pertinent to the above. After some meditation I believe you may find it relevant and like it as I do.
2. The Updating Monograph Series though a long-term expensive project could most appropriately be inaugurated for the Korzybski Centennial 1979. The series would serve at least in part to carry out Korzybski's program for the International Non-aristotelian Library. (See his last 'prospectus' thereof, preceding title page of *Science and Sanity*, 3rd ed., 1948. His first announcement, 1933, will be reproduced in the *Collected Writings*.)

The updating addenda monographs should also include detailed accounts of new approaches and ways (procedures, materials, etc.) of training/teaching/explaining the discipline which have not only been devised and written about, but successfully demonstrated long enough to allow adequate evaluation. Some work of this kind has been spoken of — mistakenly in my opinion — as a revision of Korzybski's non-aristotelian system *qua* system.

3. The word 'discovery' also bothers me. What is one talking about? I know no more clarifying discussions of the term and many of the 'whats' it is used to stand for than those written by Anne E. Caldwell, MD, in her 1970 book, *Origins of Psychopharmacology*. (See subject index for 'discovery by chance, by design, by serendipity,' etc.) I consider the whole book a masterwork, particularly important for anyone interested, as I am, in the viewpoints, the history of the work and methods of Henri Laborit. (See his Korzybski Memorial Lecture 1963 in *General Semantics Bulletin*, Nos. 30 & 31.) The Caldwell book, published by Charles C. Thomas, is one of the series edited by the Pavlovian, W. Horsley Gantt, MD, another of my medical heroes.
4. See end of note 2 above.
5. Lest I be misinterpreted here, please refer to Korzybski's 'pinch of the finger' in the brief article, 'An Extensional Analysis of the Process of Abstracting from an Electro-Colloidal Non-aristotelian Point of View,' published posthumously, *General Semantics Bulletin*, Nos. 4 & 5, 1950/1951; also in Blake and Ramsay (editors), *Perception: An Approach to Personality* (1951). The diagram and 'explanation' became what I call the crux of his seminar lectures from 1944 on. Russell Meyers uses a somewhat different appearing version in his 'On the Dichotomy of "Organic" and "Functional" Diseases,' GSB Nos. 32 & 33, 1965/1966.

