



I also found errors in their presentation of general-semantics. For example, they write "...in General Semantics, we learn that when one says it is, then, it is not." (p. 137) This painfully distorts Korzybski's premise that "Whatever we say it is, it is not".

I get the sense that the Chongs care about and help their clients, and that people who attend their "Question of Why" seminars have much to gain. I would look forward to a carefully edited and organized edition of *Don't Ask Why?!* that might better achieve their exemplary goal of a more peaceful and loving world.



**ALFRED KORZYBSKI: COLLECTED WRITINGS 1920 - 1950.** Collected and Arranged by M. Kendig. 915pp + xxvi. Englewood: Institute of General Semantics, 1990.

#### Comments by Jeffrey A. Mordkowitz

Korzybski once said "when you read a book, read not only what you read, but study the author"[1] Unfortunately, scant few published materials were easily available to apply his exhortation self-reflexively — to study the author of *Science and Sanity*[2]. Well, lament no more! With the publication of these *Collected Writings* (begun by M. Kendig in 1951 and completed by Charlotte Read, with the assistance of Robert Pula), the material is now at hand to begin to "study the author." Short of a full-scale biography or an examination of his private correspondence, a better opportunity won't exist to analyze and evaluate Korzybski's formulational development.

The *Collected Writings* contains a wide range of publications by Korzybski: formal academic papers (fifteen), "comments" or forewords to work by others (twelve), complete letters and excerpts, transcripts, mimeographs, book reviews, memoranda, editorials, and even an obituary and one patent application. The remaining twenty-five percent of the book consists of material not authored by Korzybski: nine complete articles for which he wrote forewords for or made comments on, programs for the early general-semantics' congresses of 1935, 1941 and 1949, a context-setting overview of the formative influences on Korzybski by A. W. Read, a biographical sketch by C. Schuchardt (Read), scientific opinions and other comments on the first and second editions of *Science and Sanity*, and an enlightening selection of items relevant to the founding and subsequent development of the Institute of General Semantics and the (International) Society for General Semantics.

Enough taxonomy. Let's begin examining these *Writings* in detail. Our story begins in New York City in 1920 with Korzybski's comments on "Principles of Industrial Philosophy," a paper presented by Walter Polakov. Korzybski was then in the process of publishing his first book (*Manhood of Humanity*)[3] and met regularly with Polakov and other engineers who formed the nucleus of their "Time-binding Club"[4]. Korzybski's comments on Polakov's paper sprang directly from *Manhood*. An interesting aspect of this opening entry illustrates just how deeply Korzybski impressed his friends: the included comments by Wolf and Archibald each reflect a working knowledge of A. K.'s early formulations.

In his next two papers, "Fate and Freedom" (1923) and "The Brotherhood of Doctrines" (1924) Korzybski explored the mathematical underpinnings of time-binding. Also apparent from these writings is the profound early influence Cassius Keyser had on his work. Korzybski quotes extensively from Keyser's *Mathematical Philosophy*[5] and in fact closed both of these papers with

a discussion of Keyser's "Logical Fate" diagram. Korzybski later adapted this diagram for use in his seminars. (This adaptation is also published on the cover of the *General Semantics Bulletin*.)

Korzybski's two "Time-Binding" papers (1924-1926) summarized his formulating up till then and can be considered a draft of his future opus, *Science and Sanity*. The first paper opens with a profound insight into his work: "All human knowledge is conditioned and limited, at present, by the properties of light and human symbolism." [6] In this paper he also explored the notions of mathematics as a form of human behavior, the organism-as-a-whole, the circularity of human knowledge, etc. After its publication, Korzybski went to work with Dr. William Alanson White at St. Elizabeths Hospital, Washington D.C., for two years, where he studied psychiatry and the treatment of psychiatric patients. His second Time-Binding paper is more focused as a result of this experience and he now emphasized mathematical method as applied to psychiatry.

The next several years of his life were devoted to producing his defining work, *Science and Sanity*. He delivered a summary before the American Mathematical Society ("A Non-Aristotelian System and Its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics") [7] in 1931. This was a most appropriate setting, for Korzybski's work depended fundamentally on the structure of mathematics, as he wrote: "Probably, the writer, without the study of mathematics, would not have been able to discover the ultimately extremely simple yet workable principles outlined in the present work." [8] The delivery of what was classified as his formal papers also reflected his emphasis on mathematics: nearly half of them were presented to mathematical audiences such as the American Mathematical Society, the International Mathematical Congress, the Mathematics Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, etc.

The next stop on our review is Chicago, 1939, where nearly a year earlier the Institute of General Semantics was founded. In March of 1939 Korzybski spoke before the City Club of Chicago, giving a lucid and succinct summary of general-semantics. His discussion of the problematic term "semantics" and the primacy of "evaluation" bears repeating:

The original science of semantics is dead at present. I wonder whether it was not still-born, as it dealt only with the meaning of words defined by words. . . . In the work on General Semantics we wanted to preserve the term semantics because of its international character. . . . I introduced the term General Semantics to indicate a general theory of values, a general theory of evaluation. . . . [T]he term evaluation involves both 'emotions' and 'intellect', and so automatically does not split the personality into verbalistic fictions of separate 'emotions' and 'intellect'. In General Semantics we are interested in actual evaluational reactions and not only what we say about them. [9]

Problems with the term "semantics" would continue to recur throughout Korzybski's career.

In 1940, Korzybski presented a paper before the American Psychiatric Association entitled "General Semantics, Psychiatry, Psychotherapy, and Prevention." [10] Here he covered familiar topics from a more sophisticated, higher-order point of view in order to engage the medical and scientific audience he faced. In doing so, he also set forth one of the clearest explications of his much-discussed [11] emphasis on "cortical" and "thalamic" functioning:

Through lack of space and the difficulty of presentation of so complex a subject what will be said here will be over-simplified, not to be taken literally. Thus by 'thalamus' we mean

predominantly the diencephalic region, which includes the hypothalamus, etc. By 'cortex' we mean predominantly the frontal and prefrontal cortical regions, but not excluding other cortical and subcortical levels. Dealing with electro-colloidal, functional and dynamic issues, it is impossible to be more specific without making misstatements.[12]

Following Korzybski's Introduction to the Second Edition of *Science and Sanity* are several forewords and comments written between 1941-1945. The articles themselves (which do not discuss general-semantics directly), appear here in full. Although they provide some insight into Korzybski's interests during the war years (and were penned by such well-known authors as E. T. Bell, Irving Langmuir, and Jerome Alexander) they might have best been left out in the interests of brevity.

This *Collection* closes with the "Supplementaries," which contain a wealth of unusual and illuminating entries. One of the more valuable pieces I found is the biographical sketch of Alfred Korzybski by Charlotte Schuchardt (Read). Ms. Read's sketch can be referred to often in order to place Korzybski's writings in their life context. When read in combination with Item I (Seminars and Lectures, 1935-1950) and Item VII (Chronology of Alfred Korzybski's Life) one can create a reasonably accurate road map of the twists and turns of this great scientist's life. Another item of historical interest is AK's "Protest Letter" to the Editor of *ETC.*, which helps explain the origin of some of the past differences and difficulties which once divided the Institute of General Semantics and the International Society for General Semantics.

The *Collected Writings* contain a great deal more material and I would encourage those reading this review to explore the book in depth on your own. Whether you see yourself as a beginner looking for more information on a particular topic or as a practiced student ready to tackle Korzybski's life-as-a-whole, there is something here for you.

#### REFERENCES

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- [5] Keyser, C. J. *Mathematical Philosophy*. 1922. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.
- [6] Korzybski, A. *Collected Writings*, p.59.
- [7] ——— *Collected Writings*, p. 165.

- [8] ——— *Science and Sanity*, p. 311.
- [9] ——— *Collected Writings*, p. 273.
- [10] ——— *Collected Writings*, p. 295.
- [11] Meyers, R. Semantic Dilemmas in Neurology, Psychology and General Semantics. *General Semantics Bulletin*, 1952-1953, 10 & 11:42-49. See also the comments that follow by Kelley, D. M. and Cleckley, H., pp. 52-54.
- [12] Korzybski, A. *Collected Writings*, p. 302.

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