

☆ EDITORIAL ☆

ON THE VARIETIES OF RESEARCH IN GENERAL SEMANTICS*

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IT IS NOW seventeen years since *Science and Sanity* was published, twelve years since the founding of the Institute for General Semantics. The mailing lists of the Institute for General Semantics and the International Society for General Semantics now include about 10,000 names. One may go to some thirty cities and find a group of friends of general semantics. Something like fifteen colleges and universities now offer classes on this subject. The people who have sat in classes number in the thousands.

But where are we? What does this mean? I should like to think that we have come to the end of our first phase and that we are now ready to move in a new direction. Many have caught a larger vision of the world from Korzybski's formulations. And there is some reason to believe that many have used them to break free of some of their identifications. I have heard testimony in many places that when people learned about map-territory or the extensional devices or delay of reaction, something happened to them. They became less defensive, a little more amenable to new learnings, a bit more livable-with, somewhat more creative and perceptive. And I have been told that men trained in a variety of professional activities have not only clarified and deepened their understanding of what they are doing, but also found ways of re-evaluating their personal and social useful-

* ['We shall measure the value of an orientation,' says Anatol Rapoport in his *Science and the Goals of Man*, 'not by the number of answered questions it contains but by the abundance, variety, and meaningfulness of the unanswered questions it gives rise to.' No special memorial issue of *ETC.* is planned on the occasion of Alfred Korzybski's death, for the simple reason that every issue of *ETC.* since its inception and the International Society for General Semantics are in themselves permanent tributes to his work. With Korzybski's passing, however, it is fitting that we be reminded of our time-binding function of inquiring into the abundant, various, and meaningful unanswered questions to which his great formulations have given rise. Dr. Lee's paper is here presented as an editorial, since it serves as such a reminder and clearly delineates some of the areas in which there is continuing work to be done.

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ness. I have found reassurance in these witnesses, for I, too, have gained much from the study of general semantics.

I have attended meetings galore at which people told each other how valuable this discipline is, and how much the world needs it. Wars may, indeed, start in 'the minds of men,' but so do the small doings of the day. 'Here is the means,' we have said, 'by which men may find adjustment, the freedom from those ways of evaluating which lead to trouble.' I believed these things when others have said them—indeed, even when I said them. The warmth that goes with the force of common conviction is still very pleasant. When the going is rough, an evening with others suffused in the glow of you-know-what-words leaves me comforted. And if for a few moments one surrenders to hope, he may even be fooled into thinking that because we now know how people ought to 'think' and 'feel,' they will immediately begin to.

But the power of this contagion is rather less on those who have not yet seen the vision. Sometimes personal persuasion does little. The sceptics become a little more sceptical. The unbelievers leave without even learning the names of the chief books. And those who have somehow become extensional in some areas of their work easily insist that they know all about it already.

Have we come to the point in the history of general semantics when we need new weapons? Up to now we have tried to capture assent by our own enthusiasm. Frequently that was all we needed. But with a certain kind of tough character that does not work. May I suggest that now we need something more than the logic of our own conclusions. Can we move from the grand generalizations to more immediately specific demonstrations? Can we find the means by which to overwhelm those who come into earshot with a barrage of data which may not be so readily dismissed?

My perspectives are, of course, affected by the university atmosphere in which I move. Occasionally one meets a colleague whose requests for 'papers which report findings and achievements' are a not-so-polite form of dismissal. Frequently these requests grow out of what seems a genuine curiosity, a well-I'll-be-more-likely-to-face-up-to-your-stuff-if-you-really-show-me attitude. These are the people I should like to satisfy. One is continuously impressed with the poverty of references to the bulk of the present general semantics literature in the writings of such critics as Harold Larrabee, Arthur Murphy, Barrows Dunham, Margaret Schlauch. If our lists of items were longer and deeper, one might be permitted the hope that such critics might perhaps find it harder to aim their blows in such good conscience.

The time has come, I believe, for a direct assault on a broader front. And for that we will need ammunition from many places. The findings and experiences of people in all sorts of activities will be welcome.

What, then, needs to be done? What spaces in the library need filling? Suppose one came to share my sense of need for more and more materials how and

where might he begin? What kinds of studies might be made? Let me here make a beginning listing.

1. *Bibliographies*

THERE WAS a time when one could be reasonably sure of hearing about the bulk of articles and books which dealt with general semantics. That time is no more. Writers all around the curriculum have been referring to general semantics, using some of the notions or commenting on them. Some start from the beginning, some presume a background, some summarize, others develop points of view, others report research, and so on. We need thorough-going bibliographies, a model for which might well be the monumental work of H. Lasswell, R. D. Casey, and B. L. Smith on *Propaganda and Promotional Activities*. We need annotated bibliographies for newcomers and listings which have relevance to special interests. We need listings of visual and audio materials, of mimeographed and privately distributed as well as printed and published items. The effort to produce a comprehensive catalogue might well turn up home-made charts, gadgets, pictures, etc. from which others might get some ideas. Bibliography-making is sometimes thought of as 'uncreative pedantic grubbing.' Call it that if you wish, but the need for such spade-work still remains.

2. *Studies in the Techniques of Teaching*

HOW is general semantics to be taught? How does a person learn these ways of evaluation? Have the textbooks on educational method anything for us? Or does an extensional methodology require new modes of approach? The words 'didactic' and 'directive' apply to most of the teaching I know. Have we something to learn from the teacher of arithmetic, nature study, art, manual training, or the football coach? What kinds of lectures or demonstrations or dramatized presentations leave the greatest residue? How can charts, slides, opaque projectors, synthetic devices be used? In short, what experiences in the use of training aids should be imitated or discarded? How can the project method, the case method, the laboratory method, the field method be used to help students dissolve some of their 'nursery assumptions'? What use can be made of creative dramatics and the socio-drama? Does the wartime WMC Training Within Industry program of training supervisors have anything for us? Is it possible to adapt any of the procedures of those concerned with autobiography writing and therapeutic reading? What other reading experiences make a dent?

Along with these creative developments, we need to begin the systematic analysis of the comparative effectiveness of each. How much does a student learn by what method in comparison with what other method? What devices have higher motivational value than what others? Does a person learn more in group, class-room, or individual study? There is room for much ingenuity here. Unhindered by tradition we can move in new as well as in well-tried directions.

3. *Effects of Training in General Semantics*

WHAT DIFFERENCE does the study of general semantics make in individual cases? What I propose here may, perhaps, evoke resistance in some. But I have the feeling that there is a place for carefully written personal documents, *i.e.*, witnesses to what the study of general semantics did for someone. These may take on a note of super-sanctity. They may fall into the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* error. They may even serve to rationalize deviant patterns of behavior or even to cover up more deep-seated forms of illness. They may, indeed, be specimens of the worst kinds of evaluation. But they do not have to be. Thus, there is a surgeon who, having learned about extensional methods, proceeded to get the feel of the knife on hundreds of cadavers in perfecting a single skill rather than relying (as is the usual practice) on a dozen experiences. There is a musician who suffered untold distress fighting her fears before each concert until she learned how to look at her evaluations. There are the parents who tried to raise Johnny 'by the book' until they discovered that *their* Johnny was not the Johnny in the book. There is the newspaper man who, after years of perfunctory writing and after study of the natural order of evaluation, suddenly came to understand how to go out after a story instead of refurbishing his inferences so they would sound factual. There is the man in the conciliation business who, after learning about two-valued orientations, found ways of conditioning the parties to disputes to modes of thinking a bit less rigid.

It will do us little good if these bits of drama are merely announced. They must be explained. The writer must face his situation as a case-to-be-documented. He must tell us what he considered, what he learned, and what he did. He must work out the details of his experience so that a reader might catch the process of his re-creation, might indeed catch a glimpse of something he might himself do. The writer must look on himself as an explorer charting the directions which others might follow.

It will be a mistake if a writer merely testifies to the power and glory of general semantics. The objective must, instead, be the tracing of his experiences as a way of helping others to see how he came to his insights and the results thereof.

4. *'Problem-Situation' Studies*

LET THE TERM 'Problem Situation' stand for any space-time span in which the adjustment or equilibrium of human activities is disturbed. In the language of common sense it seems possible to distinguish between the settled flow of affairs and a state of disruption in which some balance is upset. I do not wish here to debate 'the nature of normality' or compose any definition of 'normalcy.' It is enough to recognize that sometimes there is a hitch in the proceedings, some disaffection or turmoil that is upsetting someone or something,

some sort of distressing or troublesome situation which we might well look into. The following terms may, perhaps, get to what I am after: panics, riots, feuds, gossip and rumor, fads and crazes, brawls, lynchings, mutinies. And on a smaller scale: stage-fright, the fear of the dentist, temper tantrums, impulsiveness, impatience. And in a quite different area: the behavior of the accident-prone person, the dishonest, the discourteous, the indifferent, the prejudiced person; the easily insulted, the bashful, the cynical, the hypercritical, the superstitious, the sloppy or careless person, the radical, the old-fogey.

What goes on here? What do people do when they act so? What overt modes of expression can be described? What patterns of evaluation are manifested? Students familiar with the formulations of general semantics might well begin with the extensive literature in sociology and in social psychology. Many of the above phenomena are treated in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. If we play the searchlight of few-valued orientation, undelayed and undifferentiated reactions, unconsciousness of abstracting, etc., might we not see something otherwise left unnoticed? And is it possible that an analysis of the semantic reactions to be found in such problem-situations might point the way to the means of prevention and control. There is no reason why such studies should be limited to what is in the literature. Might we not sometime get out to the field, the shop, the playground, the conference room, the bargaining table, the ball-park, and the camp for first-hand study as well?

5. *Clinical Applications*

ONE OF THE MOST significant, and in a way heartening, aspects of the developing interest in general semantics is the response of a small number of physicians, psychiatrists, and dentists. This response (by no means enough yet to affect the curricula of any medical or dental school) is but a hint of the larger awareness that neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic environments have something to do with sickness and health. In recent months I have been prowling around the open shelves in our Medical School library. I have come on articles, especially in the journals devoted to allergy, geriatrics, general and internal medicine, which reveal something more than a fleeting interest in the patient's attitudes toward himself and things around him. But a glance through the pages of the catalogues of medical and dental schools reveals no corresponding program of study and training in this all-too-human part of the business. One can only wonder how our doctors and dentists are to come by other than rule-of-thumb methods to the awareness that a patient's 'feeling' and 'thinking' may be involved in his illness.

There are, too, I hear, a certain number of problems which patients bring with them to complicate the physician's life. It is conceivable that a physician trained in spotting a patient's assumptions about himself, his magically-induced verbal identifications, his second-order fears, his intensional map-making, might

find any time given over to the explicit attack on the patient's semantic reactions well spent. Just consider for a moment the possible role of the semantic reactions in the following: the fear of the dentist, the fear of an operation, the belief in the incurability of an illness, the continuing rages of a man, an inability to relax, concentrate or sleep, the effects of fatigue and 'that tired feeling,' his eagerness to find confirmation of his own diagnoses, his unwillingness to listen, his failure to obey the doctor's orders, his over-acceptance of old wives' tales and formulae, his worry over the strange labels, his two-valued expectations, his flitting from doctor to doctor in his search for quick, cheap cures, and so on.

I have heard of the effects of direct instruction in general semantics on some specific cases of claustrophobia, alcoholism, schizophrenia, combat fatigue, excessive caries—but I have never read the report of such a case written by an M.D. or D.D.S. in the approved scientific pattern in a professional journal. This is unfortunate. Certainly if trained people have seen values enough in this extensional discipline to use it, then ought we not try to persuade them to report their clinical applications? My plea to you, then, is this: if you come upon someone who is doing something with general semantics in his professional treatment of patients, do what you can to get him to write, so that others may read.

6. *Studies in Formulation Analysis*

IT IS COMMONPLACE to say that if you and I were born into another culture we would grow up with value-systems and formulations somewhat different from those we now give voice to.

We can, of course, get out from under our local assumptions. We can (though by no means easily) adopt premises which give us new perspectives. In the Introduction to the Second Edition, Korzybski says:

General Semantics is not any 'philosophy,' or 'psychology,' or 'logic' in the ordinary sense. It is a new extensional discipline which explains and trains us how to use our nervous system most efficiently.

Now then, let me suppose that one of you were trained in this new extensional discipline, and having acquired a set of premises which by 'logical fate' would lead you to more efficient neuro-semantic functioning, and suppose further that you were to face up to any of the prevailing well-defined notions in our culture—where would you come out? Thus, to be specific, what would happen if you were to look with good extensional eyes at the notions and behavior involved in the following: freedom and authority, propaganda and instruction, progressive and essentialist education, the comic, tragic and poetic, fair play and sportsmanship, competition and cooperation, politicians and statesmen, selfishness and altruism, the nature of God, the role of faith and faith-healing, the optimist and pessimist, abstinence and indulgence, the forms of recreation and relaxation, the quaint and wonderful behavior of men on the Stock Exchange, in the Wheat

Pit, around the poker table, the modes of ecclesiastical piety, the patterns of punishment and exclusion, the codes of morality, the forms of government, the habits of purchase and consumption.

I cannot predict where such studies will come out. They might conceivably become a new kind of rationalization for the *status quo* or new ways of justifying what you have already believed before you found this new analytical instrument. You might come up with the kind of nihilism that moved Charles Poore in the *New York Times* to define semantics as 'the art of telling a man that he doesn't know what he's talking about when the fact of the matter is that you really just don't like what he's saying.'

I am hopeful, however, that some of these studies might reach higher levels of intellectual honesty and creativity, that no matter where they come out they are phrased as explorations rather than revealed dogmas, that they undertake to reveal *their* assumptions in the very process of untangling the others, that they do not presume to cover more than they do. In short, these studies will be of small value if in the name of proper evaluation they employ procedures which violate the very rules they pretend to demonstrate.

I have already heard of men who, by a curious kind of verbal acrobatics, found it possible to take one or two basic principles of general semantics in order to justify or clarify what they have been doing. Thus, I know an advertising man who finds the extensional-intensional business valuable in training his ad writers to find slogans to which people respond. But nowhere in his work have I found him giving that kind of analysis to the assertions his men put together in the ads. This *little bit of extensionalization* represents a kind of fraud which we must be ever vigilant to expose. And if someone proposes studies of the great formulations in our culture, we must be on guard lest he, too, uses just a little bit of what we've got as if he were using more.

7. *Studies in Controlled Measurement*

REMEMBER the draftee rules? If it's moving, salute it; if it isn't moving; pick it up; if you can't pick it up, paint it. In good experimentalist circles one more item is added: if you aren't sure about it, measure it.

Perhaps the one area for study which will have the greatest over-all influence on outsiders is the invention of means by which to measure how much of what kind of semantic reaction a man shows in a well-defined situation. Thus, is it possible to produce a pencil and paper test by which we should be able to say that on it A is so much more two-valued or over-verbalized than B? Is it possible to construct a Proneness Measure; *i.e.*, situations to which people can respond so that we can say that A is more inference-prone or less prone to static orientations than B? What could be done as a way of indicating that A has a higher Allness Index or lower Extensionality Index than B? Is it out of the realm of the possible to hope that someone might construct an Evaluation Age Scale by

which we might come to some conclusions about the range of infantilism or maturity manifested by anyone?

It would be hard to overestimate the significance of such measures if they could be made. Just think of the immediate usefulness to counselors, personnel people, administrators, of a technique by which one could say something about another's dogmatism or teachability, his habits of realistic or verbalistic response, his eagerness to make or deny distinctions, etc. And hardly unimportant, consider the values for the discipline itself, if students could be shown that their evaluations fall into grooves from which we offer means for extrication. With such means of testing we should be able to institute checks on evaluational balance, the equivalent of surveys which now determine the incidence of venereal disease, tuberculosis, or hearing difficulties.

Pencil and paper tests are rather quickly and economically prepared and administered. But they have their weaknesses. 'What a man says may not be the same as what he thinks, and what he says he believes may not be the same as what he will do away from the test situation' is the well-known criticism. Is it possible, then, to get at the former difficulty by measuring what goes on inside-the-skin by the use of the psycho-galvanometer, the polygraph, the electro-cardiograph? Could not these checks on the inner responses also give us clues to certain kinds of evaluation patterns? I cannot here suggest how the discrepancies are to be overcome. But students moved to this sort of work have access to the backlog experience of the thousands of studies already reported in the measurement of attitudes, intelligence, and personality. I am suggesting only that the achievements of workers in inventing ways of quantifying other aspects of human activity might provide the spur to those who would do likewise with the evaluation-dimension.

8. *Side View Studies*

HERE AND THERE a student of general semantics becomes so absorbed in the formulations that he may forget that *Science and Sanity* was not written in a vacuum but amid the intellectual currents of our time. The 619 items in its bibliography were not entirely without influence on the author, either. No one was as acutely aware of this as Korzybski himself. Thus, in 1923 in his 'Fate and Freedom' paper he said:

All human achievements are cumulative; no one of us can claim any achievement exclusively his own; we all must use consciously or unconsciously, the achievements of others, some of them living but most of them dead.

Much of what I will say has been said before by many others. It will be impossible to give a full list of authors but the names of a few stand prominent; . . . Whitehead and Russell; . . . Poincaré; . . . Keyser; . . . Einstein. I will largely here use their ideas, methods and language, as my main concern is the practical application of some of their great ideas.

If, then, we were to get a deeper comprehension of the basic principles, might it not be wise to study them not only directly but indirectly in the light of tributary influences? There may be some additional advantage in this. In his *Elements of Rhetoric*, Richard Whately, more than a hundred years ago, pointed out:

It is observed by Opticians and Astronomers that a *side-view* of a faint star, or especially, of a comet, presents it in much greater brilliancy than a direct-view. To see a comet in its full splendour, you should look not straight at it, but at some star a little beside it.

What does this mean? If you will forgive the personal reference, maybe I can explain this in terms of my own experience in studying general semantics. The writings of L. J. Henderson on the successes of the medical sciences and the sources of the weaknesses in the social sciences sharpened immeasurably my understanding of the differences between intensional and extensional orientations. And a handful of essays by Mary Boole were landmarks in my awareness that it is possible to teach the habits of extensionality. The analysis of 'coincidence observation' by William H. George occupies a big place in any talking I do on 'physico-mathematical method.' The dangers involved in the identification of a label with what is being labeled took on a four-dimensional quality after my reading of T. Clifford Allbutt, Alexander Bryan Johnson, Sir Graves Chamney Haughton, and Benjamin Lee Whorf. (See my *Language of Wisdom and Folly*, Harper, 1949, in which most of these items are reprinted.)

In terms of this experience, I am moved to suggest that there are values in the study of those who are traveling along our highways. I believe we would profit from side-view studies of perceptive people who might help us to understand general semantics. Who are these perceptive people? Here is but a sampling: William James, John Dewey, Thomas Mann, G. B. Shaw, Goethe, Galileo, Walt Whitman, Jeremy Bentham, Lewis Carroll, Ibsen, Justice Holmes, Shakespeare, Coleridge, L. L. Whyte, Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, Elton Mayo, George Santayana, Vilhjalmar Stefansson, Morris Cohen, Confucius, Lao Tse, David Hume, Kurt Lewin, Eric Temple Bell. I intend no invidious classification for any names omitted. I invite side-view studies of anyone.

9. *Studies in Synthesis*

WE LIVE in a truly productive and generative period in the world's history. If you would have any doubts about this, have a look at the program of the last annual meeting of any society. Or leaf through the pages of any university bulletin. Or just prowl around the periodical room of any good-sized library. Specialization has gone so far that he is indeed courageous who ventures critically beyond the confines of his own little well-worked area.

There are many people who in the face of this chaos of specialization have come to wonder whether these divergent efforts have anything in common. Is

there any meeting point in methods or findings? Are there unifying factors which can be stated by which workers in different fields can come to feel that they are involved in a common venture? The system-builders are ever with us and sometimes their systems hold together only because they have arbitrarily excluded what couldn't be made to fit. There are those who feel that what William James did for psychology in 1890 Toynbee has not done for history and Sorokin has not done for sociology today. I am not here interested in the system-builders. I am concerned with something rather different: the effort to cut across the disciplines, to make intelligible the points at which the specialists converge. This question focuses my interest: is it possible to find any common ground by which workers in utterly different areas can define their procedures as well as pool their data? Let me take a small example. Korzybski has formulated the difference between an orientation based on verbal definitions and one based on ordering observations first, along with his analysis of the ease with which we identify the two or reverse the order. Now, then, where over the range of studies are there workers whose findings document or deny that formulation? In some very vagrant reading I have found both theoretical discussions and data on this theme in literature dealing with the following: social distance tests, allergy reactions, accident proneness, suggestion and hypnosis, counseling, curriculum-making, salesmanship, theoretical physics, theme-writing, the uses of audio-visual training aids, logical positivism, group dynamics, speech correction, perception, etc. And I am quite certain that this list could be extended further.

What I am after, then, is this: if a student is armed with one of the formulations of general semantics and if he sets out in quest of supporting or refuting data in disciplines now widely separated by departmental lines, will he uncover evidence of convergence or divergence? If, perchance, he should find that men now going their ways oblivious of their relationships with workers in other areas are in fact adventuring together, might we not make steps in the realization of the great dream of synthesis? Might we not, then, move to a new organon which will make unnecessary the regressions and retreats to doctrines which, though useful in the fifteenth century, are somewhat disorienting in the twentieth?

THERE IS NO REASON to believe that the foregoing list is anything but a beginning. There must be varieties of research in general semantics not here included which are just as significant and interesting. The classification as such is of little importance except as it may motivate someone to add something to what Stuart Chase calls 'the storehouse.' If that should happen, it would be enough.