



Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics

Alfred Korzybski

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Author : Alfred Korzybski

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From Reader Review Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics for online ebook

Pam ?Because Someone Must Be a Thorn? Tee says

"Science and Sanity" is perhaps the book that has had the most influence on my thinking. Korzybski's insight into the importance of language/semantics/reasoning is without equal.

That said, it is the one of the most difficult-to-read books I have ever run across. This stems from two principle problems. The first is that the author is not a native speaker of English. This no doubt made his explanations harder to structure. And secondly, I believe there is always going to be an inherent problem in using words to discuss words. No doubt especially true if one is building up a complex schemata.

Fascinating subject. This was the seminal work for non-Aristotelian logic and a host of other sub-specialties of Semantics. (See General Semantics @ Wiki)

And if you can slog through the book and grasp the concepts, you will never think the same again.

Kevin says

a daunting task...

Joe Watkins says

Not for the faint of heart, this is a 900 page book packed to the brim with linguistic insight. If you have no previous background with semantics or linguistics philosophy, you might want to read "Language in thought and action" or "tyranny of words", as well as Korzybski's "Manhood of Humanity," first. Once you embark upon this journey, your disposition in life will never be the same, that i can guarantee.

Academic Eric says

I started reading this online. Many interesting studies point back to it.

If you are interested in the concept of paradigm shifts, this book may give you some interesting insights.

I had a link posted here in this review because I found a free version of it online and I thought it was now in the public domain. The last time I checked the link was invalid, so I removed it.

If you find another link to it or discover whether it's actually available for free please let us know. Unfortunately, I don't have time to check right now.

Flemming Funch says

This is one of the most important books I've read. The concepts in it have become very important to my outlook on life. The reason I'm not giving it 5 stars is that, honestly, it is almost unreadable for modern humans. It is very academic. You can guess that any book that starts off with 100 pages of references just in the introduction, before it even starts, isn't going to be an easy reader. But it is well worth it. I wish that General Semantics had truly caught on. Particularly, as indicated in the title, within the practice of science. It hasn't really.

Serguei Filimonov says

The fact that "The Art of Awareness" by Samuel Bois is a very accessible, shorter summary of this, doesn't take away from this book. This book examines the fundamentals of thinking, ranging from the basic senses, to mathematics, to psychology. Applicable to every moment of waking life.

Keith says

This book is my #1 must read for all. It is a incredible tool for assisting the will to govern the mind instead of the other way around.

Mike says

As has been noted in other reviews, this is not a book for the faint-hearted. I read all of it (save the appendices) back in the sixties and was very impressed. Some of the hard science is very dated, so you have to filter much of that out. The book definitely had an effect on the way I think about things.

I found that Harry L. Weinberg's *Levels of Knowing and Existence* to be much a more accessible work on the subject. S&S was more of a textbook/source-book/reference, and not really aimed at a general audience.

Dedalus says

Two years ago if someone had asked me "Do you believe in God?" I would have answered, pronto, "No, I don't believe in God, I'm an atheist."; today I would have answered "What do you mean by 'God'?" Does it mean I'm not an atheist anymore? No, not quite. Does it mean this book is a religious experience? No, not at all. It means that when I think, individually, inside my own skin, using the words of Korzybski, when I think of God as a bearded old man, sitting up in heaven in a big cloud, throwing rays of thunder down here whenever he's pissed, I don't believe in it - I don't believe in my own idea of God. When I used to answer "I'm an atheist" I used to think, unconsciously, unaware I was abstracting, that "my God" was everybody else's 'God'. Today, if I ask "What do you mean by 'God'? I am allowing the possibility of a situation in

which I may agree with someone, someday, whoever he or she might be. I allow a possibility. The concept of 'God' as an example.

Two years ago if someone had said to me "I hated Apocalypse Now, pure garbage, pseudo-intellectual bullshit." I would think "What a stupid fella, that beauty is a masterpiece, this guy is dumb as hell, he doesn't understand anything about movies." Today I see relations, relations that define evaluations. What happened is that his relation with the movie was bad and my relation with the movie was good. Obvious, right? It isn't. Calling it a 'masterpiece' is evaluate not the movie, the "thing in itself" that doesn't exist, is evaluate the relation with the movie. Same thing occurs vice versa: only the relationship can be defined as "garbage". So, Apocalypse Now, contrary to the (yes/ no; good/ bad) Aristotelian logic, can be represented, at the same 'time', as a 'masterpiece' and a 'garbage', depending on whom bears a relation with it. Remembering that 'masterpiece' and 'garbage', a relief to films critics, are only words, adjectives, abstractions that aren't the things they represent. The 'thing' called 'movie' is in the un-speakable level, is what I gather in my memory, my consciousness of abstracting, from a larger event; the moment I have give it a name, 'a movie', verbal level, I have labeled it and ignored many left out characteristics existing in the event; "Apocalypse Now" is another abstraction; "a movie about war", another abstraction; "more than a movie about war, a movie about humanity", another abstraction; "a great movie about war and humanity/ a bad movie about war and humanity", another abstraction; and so on and on; abstractions of lower orders and abstractions of higher orders made by individual persons (p1, p2, p3, p4... pn).

The thing is I'm still in the middle of the book, haven't finished yet, and I am able already to appreciate some of its effects in my way of thinking. I remember once, in a page on YouTube, a documentary about quantum physics, a post of a smart guy who, apparently comprehended the stuff, saying something like "Now I understand that a joke can be funny and not funny at the same time." Now it makes a little sense to me.

Pr0x1mo says

The book that started it all (neurolinguistic programming)

Jim Davis says

I am a fan of classic science fiction and the many references to general semantics by authors such as A. E. Vogt made me want to go to the source of these ideas. Unfortunately I found the book unreadable. I found the language difficult to understand and overly repetitive. If I didn't understand the words and phrases the first time then repeating them several times using the same words and phrases doesn't help. I read the 4th edition which is basically the 1933 version. Was my problem because the language of science, metaphysics and psychiatry really that different then? I understand that it is implying that we need to address language in a much fuller way. We can't just look at the intellectual meaning of what we say or what we hear. We need to understand the emotional response that we have to language because of our experiences in developing our response. This is done by allowing enough time for the emotional portion of the response to rise to the surface and be identified so that you don't just react to something you hear without knowing why your response came out the way it did. Or maybe I'm missing the whole point.

Count-daniel Fogarty says

This is one of the first books that I read on epistemology of non-Euclidean geometry, post-aristotelian logic systems(multi-valued/fuzzy logic) and introduced me to mathematical systems that started my quest onto Base-12 mathematics, triangular mathematics and Neurolingustic Programming.

When I first read thus book, I sought-out to improve my verbal-currency and communication. What I got from it was a prerequisite to the meta-model of NLP and the ability to delay my reactions when interacting with other people.

Marius says

It took me a whole winter - about 5 months - to read through this opus.

I really liked it - therefore the four stars.

What I retained is that a map is not the territory, and that there can be as many maps as there are individual minds.

However, I have the impression that Mr. Korzybski never questions his core belief that there is one territory, a single objective reality that might be shared among semantically educated people, resulting in sanity for all.

After having finished the book, I felt emotionally connected to Mr. Korzybski, touched by the combination of strength, gentleness and modesty his writing exudes.

Nick Hayward says

This could be the most important book I have ever read. Korzybski lays down what is wrong with our education, thought, speech and scientific practices and then describes what we need to do to fix it.

These ideas have changed the way I think, write and speak to people and have given voice to the nagging feeling I have always had that we have been doing everything fundamentally wrong.

I agree with other reviews that say this can be a difficult book to read. When discussing ideas as fundamental as these, our normal language fails and this is part of what Korzybski is saying - we need new language and new tools to approach these concepts. With this in mind, wading through the tougher parts of the book was still well worth it for me!

Nick

Xe921 Nikhil says

I keep a print xeroxed next to my bed-top: I stare it every night: I've blazed it ever since I saw! My top-of-

the-list.

Alexx says

science and sanity is actually the antidote to many philosophies that uses confusions in their understanding of language to create meaningless questions, and respond with meaningless answers. That being said, the book tends to repeat the same messages over and over (map is not the territory, deny the is of identity).

I think however that he is a bit naive. People make mistakes when they generalize and confuse orders of abstraction, because those mistakes are beneficial to them. A synonym for this is lying.

I disagree that language is that which creates a discrepancy between technological advancement, and social advancement. It is not language that is lagging, but it's economic understanding, that creates this imbalance. Korzybski puts too much importance on language, and in doing so forgets economics.

Steven says

I am another reader whose life was changed by reading this book. I tripped over this dense tome in my searching (half-crazed) teenage phase of life. I think that is the only explanation for how I was able to slough through it. If I had first come across this today there is no way I would give it the time. Someone needs to do a condensed 200 page version. A copy has travelled with me in my life helping me to joyfully reach 56 years of age. Each time I think about a problem in my life or in the world I remember what I learned in this book.

In addition to the other factors making this book a difficult read is the author's application of mathematics and physics to explain, illustrate and justify his concepts. So in addition to the difficulty of the concepts, in themselves, is the additional issue of following arguments based in math and physics, which 99% of us don't like wrapping our brains around. I was lucky I enjoy reading about math and physics, while not having studied much of the subjects in school.

I consider this book the most valuable member of my book collection, and it has profoundly influenced many aspects of my life.

Nathalie says

It's not an easy read - but well worth it. 'Science and Sanity' changed my relationship with language radically.

Ian says

I read it age 14 and it felt like I was wandering around inside my home, it also changed me and how I

understand language, cognition, misinterpretation, misunderstanding, manipulation and religion.
