

Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences

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The Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies

Saurashtra University, Rajkot

Jointly organize

A Certificate Course

**Alfred Korzybski and Erich Fromm:
Towards a Broader Understanding of ‘Sanity’**

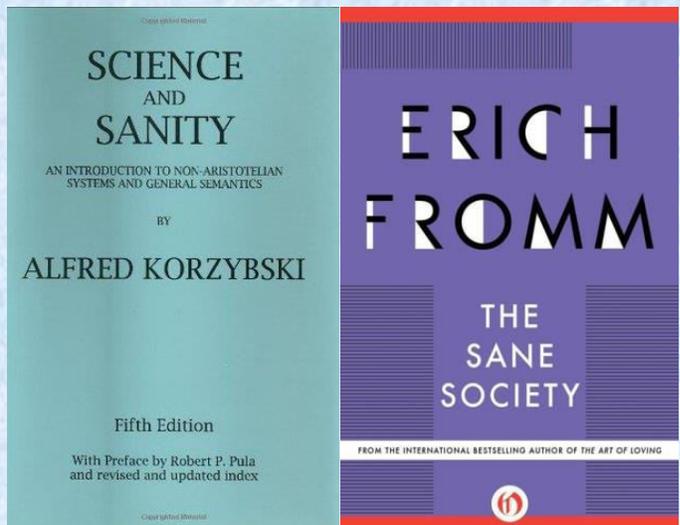
27-29 December 2017

Venue: Saurashtra University, Rajkot

Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences and The Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies, Saurashtra University, Rajkot will jointly organize a Certificate Course on “Alfred Korzybski and Erich Fromm: Towards a Broader Understanding of ‘Sanity’” during 27-29 December 2017 at the University.

Concept Note

The certificate course would introduce general semantics, its historical contexts, basic ideas and terms. The Korzybskian interpretation of sanity is pivotal to making sense of general semantics as a methodology. The course will do a contrastive as well as a comparative analysis of the limited interpretations of sanity commonly available to us and sanity’s rich diversity as an idea, practice and figure of expression. The Course will engage with Alfred Korzybski’s *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (1933) and Erich Fromm’s *The Sane Society* (1955), two iconic texts that assess the alarming crises of war, death of meaningful communication, flourishing of inhuman social traits and lopsided economic policies

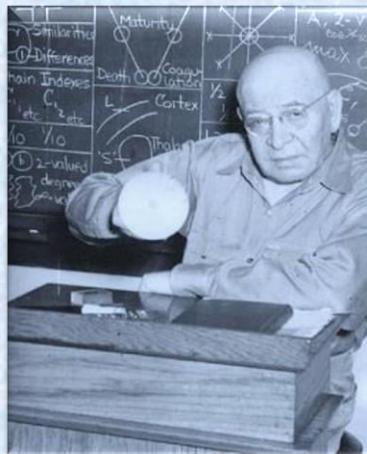


as symptoms of wide-spread ‘unsanity’. These texts do more than diagnosing and suggesting predictable cures for social ills; they challenge our ill-informed notions about what constitutes wellness and shake our faith in what masquerades as panacea.

Korzybski does not offer a simplistic solution of embracing ‘scientific thinking’ as a shortcut for discovering and clinging to sanity. In *Science and Sanity*, he challenges the misconceptions around both science and sanity. Science is not about proven certainties; it is an attitude that promotes continuous investigation of phenomena, critical and creative thinking, informed skepticism and holding one’s views more tentatively. Science is not about ossified conclusions; it is a flexible and expanding fluidity of ideas and possibilities. Scientific knowledge for Korzybski comes with a humble acknowledgement of many occasions of indeterminacy, uncertainty and limits of knowledge. Such an approach to knowledge is relevant to how we can make sense of sanity.

In common parlance, sanity would imply conformity to certain accepted norms of behavior and functionality in a given society and compliance. Degrees of deviation from the normative are often branded as impractical, unreasonable, mindless and insane. Such narrow understanding of sanity does more harm than good by dismissing and delegitimizing many non-normative, yet creative ways of thinking, being and functioning. On the other hand, the romanticization of ‘madness and insanity’ as ‘genius’ does not address the complexities of interpreting sanity.

Korzybski explains the world wars as induced collective insanity, tapping into the figurative dimensions of conceptualizing sanity. This view effectively questions the interpretation of sanity as the ability to adapt to the ‘normally’ accepted patterns. Such patterns are usually endorsed by the leaders in power or dominant ideology.



"If a psychiatric and scientific inquiry were to be made upon our rulers, mankind would be appalled at the disclosures."

Alfred Korzybski

Korzybski’s idea of scientific thinking in the context of war would call for analyzing the prevalent war-mongering prejudices and refusing to be led by the nose by the majoritarian views. War is an instance where science that gave us the knowledge to create weapons of mass destruction prevailed over sanity. In other words, science is insane if it refuses to accept ‘human weal’ and ethics as its priority.

Erich Fromm uses a similar metaphoric and psycho-social interpretation of sanity in his ruminations about the sane society. *The Sane Society* comes out of a historical moment hounded by anxieties and doubts about the drift of European civilization and Fromm’s interpretation of insanity is not limited to a clinical condition that can be diagnosed, treated and cured

methodically. The faith in rationality and values considered to be the corner stones of a presumably lofty civilization was shaken to the core by widespread violence, pogroms and wars of the century and the society felt trapped in an unending nightmare of maddening disenchantment and disillusionment. Fromm's critique is directed at capitalism being touted as a panacea that would take Europe out of the postwar crisis, which is not simply an economic crisis. Despite the hyped possibilities, the socio-political conditions and economy of the postwar times and adjustments that such conditions mandated in everyday existence intensified the alienation of human beings, making them more and more cut off from others, the environs and their own selves. Alienation in itself is disconcerting; on top of that the individual had to handle the immense pressure to prove oneself, flourish and most importantly blend without conflict in the mechanisms of production and distribution. *The Sane Society* critiques the mad rush for success and conformist ideology that characterized the postwar decades.

A sane society is not a space where homogenizing impulses and blind adaptation of the established way of life lead to a forced coexistence and quantifiable success. Success in a narrow economic sense does not ensure contentment or happiness for the individual or community; nor does it promote values of empathy, cooperation and camaraderie in society. Sanity of a society is



The fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make these vices virtues, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same form of mental pathology does not make these people sane.

— Erich Fromm —

not about resorting to acts of violence for the sake of commonly agreed upon principles of patriotism and racial solidarity to accomplish some inconsequential victory. Tolerance and respect for diversity, the ability to accommodate diverging ways of thinking and

being rather than restricting one's perspective to what is the most acceptable and viable, an imaginative and creative mode of existing, and most importantly expanding the self's terrain of ideas to acknowledge and accommodate others' views, ideas and experiences in a non-hegemonic way would contribute to a sane society, according to Fromm.

Registration

The Certificate Course is open to scholars from various disciplines, preferably humanities and social sciences. The registration fee for the Course is **Rs. 1000**, which may be sent through a bank draft or cheque favoring 'Balvant Parekh Centre for GS & OHS' payable in any bank in Baroda. You may also do a direct bank transfer and the account details would be provided upon request. The fee will take care of lunch and tea, course material and a copy of *The Book of Radical General Semantics*, which will be sent to each registered participant by post. The registration fee does not include the cost of accommodation in Rajkot and is non-refundable.

Those interested in participating in the Course are required to send their applications (with full name, designation & institutional affiliation, address to which the book has to be sent, phone number and email) and registration fee before **November 20, 2017** to the coordinator of the workshop, Bini B.S. The course material would be sent to you after receiving the registration fee. Outstation participants who need accommodation in Rajkot are requested to contact the convener, Kamal Mehta. The participants have to make their own travel arrangements.

For details, contact:

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Bini B. S.

(Coordinator of the Workshop)

Academic Fellow and Program Officer

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