

# the art of awareness

fourth  
edition

J.  
Samuel  
Bois

# **The Art Of Awareness**

**a handbook on  
epistemics  
and general semantics**

**fourth edition**

**J. Samuel Bois**

**edited and with a forward by Gary David**

Continuum Press & Productions  
Santa Monica, California

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## other books by J. Samuel Bois

*Explorations in Awareness.* New York: Harper & Row, 1957.

*Communication as Creative Experience.* Los Angeles: Viewpoints Institute, 1968.

*Breeds of Men: Toward the Adulthood of Humankind.* New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

*Epistemics: The Science-Art of Innovating.* San Francisco: International Society of General Semantics, 1972.

## forward

J. Samuel Bois formulated *The Art of Awareness* over a period of sixteen or seventeen years. Originally published in 1966 as a textbook in general semantics by the William C. Brown Co., it has been through three editions. In 1933 Alfred Korzybski introduced the new human science which he called general semantics without reflecting on the possible shrinking of the field he was introducing due to the confusion around the term “semantics.” This term misled many to limit his work to communications and language usage. The second edition of *The Art of Awareness* dispelled that confusion by introducing epistemics as a further development of general semantics. This edition continues that development.

Technically speaking, epistemics can be described as applied epistemology. Epistemology is the science of our meaning activities; it involves inquiries into how we know what we know, and what are the core assumptions that hold our knowledge of the world, including ourselves, together in a way that makes sense to us. Each culture does this in a unique way. Epistemology, in our growing humility, attempts to put some order in the “towers of babble.”

Korzybski wrote in his influential work, *Science and Sanity*, “Not every individual knows or realizes the importance of, or seemingly consciously cares for epistemology; yet every one unconsciously has one and acts and lives by it. Each individual has his own special problems, the solution of which always claims the whole man, and no man is complete, unless he consciously realizes the permanent presence in his life of some standards of evaluation. Every one has thus some epistemology. There is no way of parting with it—nor with air, nor with water—and live. The only problem is whether his standards of evaluation are polluted with primitive remains of bygone ages, in a variety of ways . . .”

Samuel Bois’ purpose in developing epistemics was to make the “wisdom of the ages” available to the nontechnical person as well as professionals in psychology, the sciences, education, and the arts. The wisdom being made available was an awareness of our limitations in making sense of what is going on within and outside of us;

that we are never just observers but involved participants in whatever we experience; that life goes on as a whole; and that the *differences* and *similarities* we distinguish and perceive “out there” are the results of our attempts to further our purposes or to measure - they are not inherent in the processes we are paying attention to.

Recent developments in epistemics have shifted its emphasis to *communion as an art*, rather than emphasizing the evaluative, and communication of information processes as general semantics was prone to do. Those aspects are still the basics, but the realm that epistemics covers in addition is the interface (the worlds in which we live) between the movements that shape all life forms (the formative tendency) and the manifest world of appearances as we humans see it.

Bois wrote in a letter, “(The) ultra-modern science as I practice it is not alien to what we call simple faith and religious ritual. Lived in participating awareness, these add the glow and the warmth of educated feeling to the well-articulated structure of acquired knowledge.”

“Participating awareness” is a good way to describe the activity of epistemics in action. This kind of awareness does not seek to teach, correct, or change. By its presence, its insights will participate in any activity and modestly bring another kind of order to it; an order that can allow us to loosen our distressed grip on what concerns us. In this way a kindly awareness, not a threateningly confrontive one, emerges between what we say and do. We then have available what we sense at the silent levels of our hearts where we are at one with the whole of existence.

In its own quiet way, *The Art of Awareness* has become a part of college courses; it is being used by professionals in many fields such as sociology, history, communications, engineering, psychology, the fine arts, and literature; and it is also being used by non-professional individuals in their day-to-day living. Many of its users claim that it is still relevant to their lives, and a fourth edition is warranted.

What makes *The Art of Awareness* still up-to-date after thirty years? For one thing, it is not about a specialized branch of learning. Its postulates and formulations can be tested in any field, regardless of content. It is written from a general, structural, and methodological point of view which makes it less susceptible to the changing information of a specialized, technical science. Also, each edition introduces an update of its information and formulations.

In 1975, during the preparation of the third edition, in a letter to his publisher Bois wrote, "I am now eighty-three years of age, and I expect the third edition of *The Art of Awareness* to be the final "summa" of my contributions to my chosen field. (I want to) give you some idea of the changes I am contemplating. They will eventually transform *The Art of Awareness* into a practically different book. I propose a new title, as follows: *Epistemics: a handbook of scientific awareness and progressive self-management*. This will make it possible to introduce the book, not only in courses on semantics and communications, but also in first and second years of college, in professional schools, and even at the graduate level. The new title is for the purpose of singling my work out of the field of epistemological sciences and disciplines."

The publisher rejected the new title for business purposes since *The Art of Awareness* was a title already well-known. But Bois' point was to signal the need for radical revision to stay with the growing tip of cultural developments.

Now a note to current users of *The Art of Awareness*. I worked on the 1978 revision when Dr. Bois was too ill to do it. In considering this new edition, I saw that our previous revision had introduced what I consider extraneous material to satisfy the then publisher's needs. I have weeded some of it out, and reorganized the book.

The book is now divided into three parts: Part I is called **Evaluating**, dealing with conceptual revolutions, epistemology, semantic transaction and the process of abstracting.

Part II is **Innovating**, which includes time-binding, the structured unconscious, the stages of cultural development, a reformulating of objectivity, mental models, the structure of languages, love as a cosmic energy, and practices in awareness.

Part III is called **Participating**. It is here that I made the most radical changes. The original edition did not have a separate section on Participating. The 3rd edition did, but Dr. Bois died before we could finish; I had to use some papers I found in his files to flesh out his views on Participating. In living with that section in the third edition, I found that it needed reorganizing, some material deleted, and some new material from Dr. Bois' files added. The result is what you find in this edition. This is an introduction to stage-5 of the Bois-Bachelard epistemological profile. It covers unifying, or "peak" experiences as stage-5 type experiences, and participating as a way of life.

I moved most of the historical material involving general semantics and epistemics to the Introduction. When Dr. Bois made the transition from general semantics to epistemics, *The Art of Awareness* had already been written. So this book became a transitory work that shows the birth of the new discipline. I have tried to clear up any confusions in this regard through a reorganization of material and chapters.

I call your attention to the bibliography. Both Dr. Bois and I took great care in suggesting books and parts of books to supplement each chapter. I included supplementary material from some of Dr. Bois' other books. I highly recommend all of the material included. Granted, some of the suggested books are out of print, but you will be greatly rewarded if you make the effort to find them. There are some great, neglected gems that have stood the test of relevancy. The dedicated individuals who made these valuable contributions should not be overlooked or forgotten.

One note about the use of this text: it can be taken up as an independent study, but best results are obtained by working with someone who has internalized the material. Our experience at Viewpoints Institute in Los Angeles, and in educational institutions where the book is used is that it takes at least two years of intensive work to prepare a teacher to participate with a group in epistemics.

The spirit of *The Art of Awareness* is in keeping with what Dr. Bois wrote in a letter in 1974: "Writing a book is accepting to enter into transactions with any number of persons to whom you give the right to 'touch' you, to examine your brain and to evaluate whether it is sound, clear and well informed or not; to see whether it is consistent in its logic or confused and erratic, narrow-minded or broad-spanned, prejudiced or fair to all. It is accepting to bare your heart and soul, explicitly or implicitly, to anyone who will feel free to question your motivations, your most cherished values, your camouflaged guilt feelings or your hidden ambitions, your unexpressed views of yourself and of your personal world, your self-centeredness - - if it is showing through -- or your genuine altruism -- if it is strong enough to ooze between the values you present."

Gary David, Ph.D.



## **preface to the second edition**

In the introduction to the first edition I wrote "Advances are made that run parallel to general semantics, or that go beyond its early formulations, and the discipline itself may become submerged in a flood of more daring initiatives."

Seven years have passed since this was written, and, if we take into account the constant acceleration of cultural changes, we may wonder if the time has not already come for something more than a mere re-edition of this textbook. When we see the rash of best-sellers that broadcast the counter-culture, the greening of America, and the future shock, we should expect any time now, should we put aside the original views of Korzybski and their developments contained in the first edition of this textbook, or should we keep most of it as the necessary foundation of a solid structure in which the present sciences of man can establish their headquarters for a few generations?

I feel that this second alternative is the most practical. Of all the literature I have read in recent years, either in book form or in learned periodicals, none has dealt to my satisfaction with the inner workings of the new episteme-in-becoming, with the new general system of knowing-feeling-behaving that makes us view ourselves and our world in a perspective so far unforeseen.

Many writers are vivid in their descriptions of what is happening; many are eloquent in their announcement of what might happen. But I am still looking for a down-to-earth *how-to-do-it* text that tells the young generation how to enter the ranks of the parade of mankind on the march and become the relay team that will be capable of carrying on. Their own fate is at stake. They may think they have, as the saying goes, "discovered America," greening or drying up. They did not. Many individuals of previous generations, some well-known philosophers like Bergson and Whitehead, some statesmen like Jan Smuts, some scientific thinkers like Korzybski and Arthur F. Bentley, and a host of common folk have been aware of what was going on and what was likely to happen. Some of us are still here, very much alive, witnessing a young crowd that is just waking up, has a ten-

dency to be dramatic about everything, and shows signs of getting emotionally involved. It might be good for them to know that some of us, way back when they were not yet born, had the same aspirations they now feel within their breasts. We had time to live with these puzzlements for many years, and we tried various formulations, some of which have proved helpful in our personal life and in our professional work. And that is the subject of this book.

The feedback I have received from the users of the book is most gratifying. This text withstands more than a casual reading or a quick cramming for an examination. Some have used it a second time for advanced studies, and they felt they had not exhausted the meaning buried in its depths. The reading references provided a well-orchestrated accompaniment to the main themes.

We have discovered, however, that both the instructors who teach from the book and the students who learn from it encounter difficulties that are traceable to their lack of familiarity with the overall sweep of our cultural history. It is not sufficient for them to know geographical and political history about kings, governments, wars, battles and treaties of peace. They should have within reach and consult repeatedly such books as *An Intellectual and Cultural History of the Western World* by Harry Elmer Barnes (Dover edition in three volumes, 1965), or the profusely illustrated *Great Ages of Man, A History of the World's Cultures* by the Editors of Time-Life books, including at least four volumes of the *Nature Library* published by the same Time-Life Books: *Evolution, The Primates, Ecology, and Early Man*. For those who want more than that, the *History of Civilization* of Will and Ariel Durant, in ten volumes, covers what it says it does, and with considerable erudition, until the time of the French Revolution. Of the additions that make this second edition different from the first, two deserve special mention. One is inserted in Chapter 7, "The Worlds in Which We Live"; it reproduces an article published in *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, (1970) under the title "Mankind as a Cosmic Phenomenon." The editor of *Main Currents* had summed it up in a subtitle: "Human solidarity is an evolutionary emergent to be discovered, experienced, taught."<sup>1</sup> An attempt is made

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced by permission of *Main Currents*, which is gratefully acknowledged.

to make of this discovery an enrichment of the picture we already have of the full space-time process of cosmic evolution.

The *Art of Awareness* has given birth to many teaching programs that are distinct variations from the original. At the University of Southern California, Dr. William J. Williams has applied it to various aspects of public administrative theory and practice and authored a book entitled *General Semantics and The Social Sciences* (Philosophical Library, 1971) that broadens its scope to all the sciences of man. At the Western States College of Engineering, Inglewood, California, Professor David Muskat introduced a course that competes with the rigor of mathematical logic. At Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, a teaching text, explicitly derived from the present volume and replete with practical exercises, was prepared by Donald Patrick of Montreal and is used for a course sponsored by the Institute of Canadian Bankers.

This second edition has the same objective as the first; it gives, against the background of our cultural history, an explanation of the changes we are going through and a set of directives as to how to make the most of the opportunities offered by these changes.

J.S.B.

## preface to the first edition

The cultural movement called general semantics (GS) can be traced to the 1933 publication of a huge and abstruse volume, *Science and Sanity* by Alfred Korzybski.<sup>1</sup> From this book, as from an overflowing spring, much writing originated that constitutes a definite class of self-help literature. It deals with the application of Korzybski's insights and formulations to various fields of human activity: word usage and communication (as in the works of the well-known authors, S. I. Hayakawa, Irving Lee and Stuart Chase), psychological counseling (Wendell Johnson and Harry Weinberg), education (Catherine Minter, and Weiss and Hoover), architecture and design (Newton), management skills (McCay), and even Wall Street operations (McGee).

While these and other authors were stressing the *practical* aspects of the new methodology, the mainstream of epistemological thought continued to flow and spread in a literature that concerned itself with the *theoretical* aspects of the change in ways of thinking that had been forced upon us by scientific advances and shifts in values. Most of the authors in this second area ignored general semantics, others criticized and ridiculed it without having studied it thoroughly, and only a few acknowledged its significance as one of the symptoms of our current cultural metamorphosis.

There is now, however, an abundant literature in this area, starting with Bergson, Blondel, Whitehead, and others. Recent authors include Percy W. Bridgman, Karl Popper, Michael Polanyi, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Gaston Bachelard, Louis Rougier, Floyd Allport, Gardner Murphy, Anatol Rapoport, Arthur F. Bentley, John Dewey, J.Z. Young, Rugg, Benjamin Whorf, Harold Rugg, Laura Thompson, Oliver Reiser, among many. Most of these have written

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<sup>1</sup> Published by the International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co. and distributed by the Institute of General Semantics (Lakeville, Conn); 1st ed. 1933, 4th ed. 1958.

for their colleagues in the academic world about technical matters using technical terms not yet current in everyday speech. They have assumed the reader has a good background of information in contemporary sciences.

The present book belongs to neither the practical nor the theoretical group; it has something in common with both. It belongs to the general semantics family of publications, although it is not mainly concerned with practical applications; it deals with epistemological problems, although it is not directed to a sophisticated audience of scientists and philosophers. It treats the Korzybskian system as a system, by and for itself. It examines it as a system in evolution that was started by Korzybski one generation ago in the cultural climate of the time and that continues to develop today under fast-changing conditions.

I do not equate general semantics with other proposed theories and systems nor do I see it merely as a new science or technology, such as cybernetics. I postulate it as a *system* that, if properly developed, could assume in the future the role that Aristotelian epistemology and logic have played for centuries in the Western world.

Many thinkers recognize that a new set of general principles is necessary if we want to coordinate and utilize the findings of the new sciences of man.

How are these insights to be brought together and synthesized? This is a task which I cannot claim to have performed here, but I have examined the problem long enough to believe that it cannot be done without some set of broad and informing principles such as is to be found in the general semantics of Alfred Korzybski.<sup>2</sup>

I agree with Professor Hayakawa, and I go one step further. I agree that such a synthesis cannot be achieved without some set of broad and informing principles, as are found in general semantics; but I also claim that the insights and formulations of Korzybski—if consistently developed in the self-correcting manner his system requires—are sufficient to bring about the desired synthesis. They form

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<sup>2</sup>S.I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, rev. ed. (New York; Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. x.

a matrix in which every advance in the sciences of man can find its place for many generations.

The present volume is the outcome of twenty years experience in teaching general semantics, from the days when I was a visiting instructor at seminars conducted by Korzybski in 1947, 1948 and 1949. After his sudden death in March 1950, I was the main lecturer at the first regular summer seminar held without him—at Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Later, I conducted advanced seminars at the Institute which Korzybski had founded, and, as a management consultant, I developed a course of training for business executives that was based on his methodology. For the last seven years, I have been conducting adult-education workshops in general semantics in Beverly Hills, California. Three years ago, we founded Viewpoints Institute, Inc. "a center for the study, practice and development of general semantics," where workshops at the introductory, intermediate and advanced levels are conducted throughout the academic year.

In 1961, I gave thirty half-hour talks on two radio stations owned by Pacifica Foundation: KPFK in Los Angeles and KPFA in San Francisco. The transcripts of these talks have been used as a text for the workshops conducted at Viewpoints and for the credit courses given for University Extension on three campuses of the University of California, at Los Angeles, San Diego and Riverside. This book is a revision of these transcripts after four years of use with some fifteen hundred students, whose reactions and suggestions have been taken into account.

The book is intended for undergraduate and graduate courses in any discipline dealing with human behavior, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, political science, communications, literature. It also will serve a useful purpose in general background information required of students in such professional schools as medicine, architecture, engineering, education, business administration, and the ministry. It already has proved its value in courses, seminars and workshops, and discussion groups organized by local chapters of the International Society for General Semantics and by organizations that are devoted to adult education.

—J.S.B

## editor's acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude to Ethel Longstreet, current President and co-founder of Viewpoints Institute with J.S. Bois, for her friendship, help, encouragement, and steadfastness. This edition of *The Art of Awareness* would never have been published without her support. Her dedication for over forty years has justified Dr. Bois' faith in putting his manuscripts in her hands. Ethel is an innovator in the teaching of general semantics and epistemics. I found her experientially oriented approach invaluable. I know I can speak for hundreds of others who had the good fortune of attending her never easy, but invariably rewarding, classes.

I also want to thank Dick Grosslight, a poet and fellow Director of Viewpoints. His humor and encouraging support was invaluable in getting this fourth edition in print.

Finally, I want to thank David Muskat, a scholar and teacher of epistemics, for the long hours we spent going over the book in great detail. His knowledge of how other teachers are using the book, and his enthusiasm for the new edition was extremely helpful to me.

—Gary David

## acknowledgments for the third edition

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the collaborative efforts of Dr. Gary David and Annie Muller who helped me in revising this edition of *The Art of Awareness*. It is gratifying for me to have two of my former students, teachers of general semantics and epistemics in their own right, contribute to this work.

Dr. David brought the whole manuscript together. He organized and integrated my revisions and additions into a new order, as well as contributing significant new material.

Mrs. Muller contributed many helpful suggestions, as well as unflagging support and assistance, as we worked together on the first draft of the manuscript.

Special thanks to Verlin Heuton for important research and for our conversations. To Ethel Longstreet, my cofounder of Viewpoints Institute, who has helped me in developing this work over the years, my deepest appreciation.

—J. S. B.



## about the author

### J. Samuel Bois 1892 - 1978

J. Samuel Bois saw his own life as a three-stage odyssey: priest, psychologist, epistemologist. He was born in Canada in 1892 in a long cabin in the tiny Quebec settlement of Stratford Centre.

He attended Laval University where he received his B.A. He then studied theology and he was ordained a Catholic priest. As a worker-priest, he organized labor unions, founded a weekly newspaper, and as a Jesuit, he worked as a missionary.

Bois said, "I was beginning to be a prominent man in the Catholic clergy in Quebec. I tried to reform the clergy—preached things that could be interpreted differently." He thought things he was not supposed to think, and said things he was not supposed to say, and did things he was not supposed to do. Consequently, after more than twenty years as a priest, he was condemned by a Catholic Tribunal in Montreal for preaching that with love, all will be good. "This translated as 'love, and do what you want.' They thought I meant free love, not God-love." He appealed to the Holy Office in Rome where he was "a prisoner of high offices, under strict supervision." Bois later wrote, "I saw that my appeal would be put off indefinitely." Eventually, the Church granted him a discharge 'by privilege' from the ranks of the clergy.

Meanwhile, he turned his attention to other things. In June 1936, then 44 years of age, he obtained a Ph.D. in psychology from McGill University, Montreal, Canada. In July of the same year, with a younger colleague, he opened the first psychological consulting service in Canada.

He enlisted the attention of some influential people in government and academe in the direction of mental testing, penal reforms and the establishment of clinics. In a 1977 letter Bois wrote, "We were then covering the whole front of advance in services offered to the public: vocational guidance, psychotherapy, measurement of public opinion, communication, administrative practices, group organization, etc. I was keenly aware of those various tasks, and I was searching for some general method of improving our service to the