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ON BELIEF SYSTEMS AND LEARNING

A debate from the Alextech e-mail discussion group on the validity of the premises of the Alexander Technique

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INTRODUCTION:

This is a record of an e-mail debate that began on the AlexTech e-mail discussion list when I stepped into an existing discussion (on the Alexander Technique vs. other modalities) with a challenge as to the validity of the Alexander concepts and premises. The 'debate' raged for some weeks and then died out (almost) as it became clear that we could go no further with words. Those who had their own ideas would keep them and those who wished to know more could only do so by making their own experiments or experiencing my work first hand (some, though a very few, have already made arrangements to do so). When I decided to withdraw from the debate, there are still some outstanding questions in the final few postings but enough was enough and it was clear that nothing more would be gained by anyone writing even more words...

As you will see, the atmosphere of reaction and personal response is intense enough that many people did not want to express their true feelings to the open list. I received numerous messages sent to me privately by list members, mostly in support of me speaking up, with some saying that what I wrote helped them a lot. I'm sure that other participants in the debate also received many private messages too. Unfortunately, because of their private nature, these replies are not available to the on-line version of the debate.

Several of participants in this debate who sent in the more personally attacking postings were later thrown off the Alextech list for their *ad hominum* attacks and refusal (or inability) to control their reactions. The same thing happened again later when they were allowed back on the list and eventually the Alextech list became a moderated list—that is, all subsequent messages passed through a moderator who could censor the more offensive ones.

This entire public AlexTech list debate is now permanently posted to the DirectionJournal web site. The address there is <http://www.directionjournal.com/alextech>.

NOTE: this version of the debate that you are reading now includes newer material sent to me by people who have read this recently and who wished to contribute their own responses. The Direction Journal version is limited to only the postings from the Alextech e-mail list.

This more complete version is available on-line at www.learningmethods.com/debate/.

I have included the 10 articles that precede my first posting so that you can make sense of what was going on when I came into it (feel free to skip these if you want—I step into this at the end of the 2nd column on page 7), as well as a new section with the responses that came to me long after the debate was over.

David Gorman
Provence, 1998

POSTINGS:

Date: Wed, 17 Jun 1998 01:36:25 +0100
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: Compatibility

Bravo John Coffin! It is not often enough that the attempts to establish kinship between the Alexander Technique and other 'modalities' are assertively rebutted. It recently occurred to me that any intelligent person, attempting to understand the Technique by referring to articles and writings published by Alexander teachers in STATNews, on this list and elsewhere could be forgiven for coming to the conclusion that the technique is a therapy compatible with absolutely everything else, from psychotherapy to yoga, from tai chi to massage. In fact, considering the relative infrequency of objecting voices, it could be concluded that this was the general consensus of the Alexander community as a whole.

Alexander devoted a great deal of space and energy in his books to establishing the fact that in terms of fundamental principles his technique was completely different from all of the other approaches to the human condition that were in vogue at the time, both orthodox and alternative. Although fashions have changed since then, and we have to consider 'modalities' that Alexander did not specifically discuss, the clash of fundamental principles is just the same today. It is a constant source of surprise that so many writers on the Technique seem oblivious to these principles. The assertions that I sometimes read are like claims that the Ku Klux Klan is compatible with Kabuki theatre because they are both group activities, they both express cultural or sub-cultural values, and they both wear masks! (and they both start with 'K')

Alexander disparaged any 'modalities' that were based on the following principles:

1) A specific approach. The view of the inseparability of mental and physical processes and the concept of psycho-physical unity means that any approach that addresses specific parts of the human being whilst ignoring others can only make changes by shifting the problem elsewhere. Massage for example is based on this principle, as is psychotherapy. There are a great many 'modalities' which claim to be holistic but if their practice is analysed they can be seen to be based on a specific approach or an amalgamation of specific approaches.

2) An end-gaining approach. It is pointless to try to attain personal change or growth through following precepts or examples without being provided with the means whereby to achieve this. The proper means-whereby for any human activity involves the conscious control of our co-ordinating mechanisms (the primary control) as well as the reasoned co-ordination and control of any specific actions (mental or physical) appropriate to the task at hand. Yoga for example is based on an end-gaining approach. Some may argue at this point that if they use the technique to study Yoga they can ensure the proper means-whereby. However the question arises, if you have the Technique, why study Yoga at all? I am admittedly ignorant about Yoga so you may convince me

yet of its value. However before you do, consider the next principle.

3) An approach which is based not on reasoned observation, but on faith, superstition, tradition, or other primitive bases. This is a more philosophically difficult area as I cannot say that these approaches are completely false. However it also cannot be shown that there is any truth in them. To each his own to some extent. I agree with Alexander: there may be "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy", but it has always seemed to me that the first duty of man was and is to understand and develop those potentialities which are well within the sphere of his activities here on this earth." (CCC, 1924, p ix) The main point for this discussion on compatibility is that the Alexander Technique was developed from a rigorous scientific epistemology which does not marry with these other approaches, and will not, until they can be established through the same means of objective observation and verification.

4) An approach which mistakes effects for causes. An acquaintance of mine recently recounted to me the physiotherapy session he had attended for his back pain. He described the treatment he had received and his hopes that his pain would not recur. I asked him what, in the physiotherapist's view, was the cause of the pain. He described a compression of lumbar disks, a pressure on nerves and a spasmodic set of muscles. I asked him then what was the cause of those conditions, and he just stared blankly back at me, unaware of any explanation for the origins of these conditions. According to Alexander Technique, the cause lies in the manner of use of my acquaintance and how that brought about the effects described by his physiotherapist. Physiotherapy is ignorant of causes, treats only effects and leaves the root conditions unchanged, either to bring about a recurrence of the problem, or to create another and perhaps more serious one. Physiotherapy is only one such 'modality' which makes this fundamental error. Orthodox medicine does it as well in a great many areas. It is true that the short term analgesic effects of such treatments are valuable, however they cannot be said to be compatible with the technique. A problem can only be truly solved by removing its cause.

5) An approach which treats feelings as being reliable. We all know that Alexander discovered the unreliability of feelings. We cannot rely on them to tell us the state of affairs in ourselves or to serve as a reliable guide in any sort of activity, therapeutic or otherwise. The Technique asserts the need to develop the guidance of the conscious reasoning processes, representing a move forward from our instinctive and subconscious reliance on habit and feeling. The 'modalities' that are based on this principle are many indeed! (This is closely related to #2 above)

I have listed five principles which for the Alexander Technique are non-negotiable (There may be others as well). If you discard or fudge these in any way you no longer have the Alexander Technique. I urge anyone who is trying to combine the Technique with anything else to

consider these carefully, and if their combination represents a compromise of these principles then it cannot be referred to as the Alexander Technique. Call it anything you like. Perhaps it's a new 'modality' altogether, but it's not the Technique.

Allow me now to illustrate the above arguments about compatibility by looking in more detail at psychoanalytic psychotherapy. I choose this subject only for the reason that I have had many discussions about it with a friend who is an Alexander Teacher and in my attempts to understand his point of view have both read and experienced something of it. He argues that together psychoanalysis and the Technique provide a complete package: Alexander for the physical, and psychoanalysis for the mental/emotional. However in doing so it is obvious that he does not maintain the concept of the technique as addressing the psycho-physical whole. He has confined it to the physical sphere. This change of definition allows the two to be combined but unfortunately it is no longer the Technique. Psychoanalysis is a specific approach, seeking psychic explanations for psychic problems and proposing psychic solutions. As such it is not compatible with the proper representation of the Technique which asserts the inseparability of mental and physical processes (see #1). When I have had the energy to follow the twists and turns of my friend's arguments and eventually confront him with this inconsistency he has claimed that in that case, Alexander is wrong. Well at least this is an honest assertion of his position, though perhaps not based on sound reasoning. I wonder why he continues to teach and promote a technique which he thinks is wrong.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is an attempt to understand human behaviour through accessing feelings, fantasies, dreams and other subjective material (see #5 - unreliability of feelings) and one of its most fundamental assumptions is of the dynamic unconscious, an intrapsychic entity which influences or drives our behaviour in sometimes irrational ways. It is significant that this entity has been constructed entirely on the basis of inference. No one has any other evidence of its existence. This bears significant similarities to the inference of gods and demons, characteristic of man's more primitive stages (see #3 - primitive basis), as external entities to account for otherwise inexplicable manifestations of behaviour. This intrapsychic structure is further divided into ego, superego and id (if you're a Freudian) or into internalised objects representing significant others in your childhood (if you favour the object relations theory). Alexander asserts that the dynamic unconscious is a mistaken assumption:

"The aggregate of these habits is so characteristic in some cases that we see how easily the fallacy arose of assuming an entity for the subconscious self, a self which at the last analysis is made up of these acquired habits and of certain other habits... Fortunately for us there is not a single one of these habits of mind, with their resultant habits of body which may not be altered..." (MSI 1946 p.51)

Finally, as an attempt effect a change in the human being, psychoanalysis does not offer the means whereby it can be achieved (see #2 - end gaining). It is significant that objective measures have been unable to find evidence of its success beyond the placebo effect and more subjective measures, such as asking those who have experienced it for their views, has similarly produced unremarkable

results. Although there are enthusiasts, remember that 30% of people who have had lobotomies will speak in glowing terms about how good it has been for them!

At this point I shall come to a close. It is my intention to promote a reasoned understanding of Alexander and not just to disparage other 'modalities', but this necessarily involves discriminating between what makes sense and what doesn't. It is also not my intention to assert that Alexander is a complete and finished subject. I would argue to the contrary that there is still much to be discovered and there is much good work being done in the Alexander world in this regard. As well as the good work people are doing on directions for example, and other purely Alexander concepts, we should turn our attention to the observations that have been made in these other 'modalities'; but rather than accepting their interpretation we should look to re-theorise these observations from the standpoint of the Alexander Technique. Freud may have been working to a wrong principle but he was no dummy. What he saw may have great value if we recast it in Alexander terms. We also must be prepared to accept that Alexander could be wrong. Many great theories and practices have been superseded by better understanding. However we should only accept sound reasoning, observation and evidence in this regard and until such is forthcoming we should regard Alexander as providing the best explanation for human behaviour and the best practice for improving the human condition. Arguments on any other basis will not suffice.

David Langstroth, david@alexandertec.u-net.com
Cardiff, Wales

Date: Thu, 18 Jun 1998 09:04:05 EDT
From: Robert Rickover Rrick2@aol.com
To: david@alexandertec.u-net.com,
alextech@life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: Compatibility

In his thoughtful post, David Langstroth wrote:

"The proper means-whereby for any human activity involves the conscious control of our co-ordinating mechanisms (the primary control) as well as the reasoned co-ordination and control of any specific actions (mental or physical) appropriate to the task at hand. Yoga for example is based on an end-gaining approach. Some may argue at this point that if they use the technique to study Yoga they can ensure the proper means-whereby. However the question arises, if you have the Technique, why study Yoga at all? I am admittedly ignorant about Yoga so you may convince me yet of its value."

I guess the implication of this is: Why study anything other than the AT? Even FM seemed OK with applying his ideas to Golf (he wrote a whole chapter about it in UOS)- an end-gaining activity if ever there was one! Alexander could certainly be said to "have the Technique" and yet he was a deeply flawed individual. Maybe he could have benefited from (gasp!) therapy. Maybe even Yoga. Who knows.

David also wrote:

"The main point for this discussion on compatibility is that the Alexander Technique was developed from a rigorous scientific epistemology which does not marry with these

other approaches, and will not, until they can be established through the same means of objective observation and verification."

Just what is this "riggerous scientific epistemology" and what "objective observation and verification" does that AT have that's missing from other approaches?

Robert Rickover

Date: Thu, 18 Jun 1998 14:16:23 -0500 (CDT)
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: fhooper@postoffice.ptd.net (Fred Hooper)
Subject: Compatibility with forward and up

Hi, all,

Are we having fun yet? I daresay, "Yes!"

Well, I have a confession: I used to believe or think or feel (or something) that I understood 'forward and up' until I got on this list.

What truly made me wonder was that there was such a bevy of opinions from long-time teachers on what this phrase means.

When I learned this phrase, it was much more than those dastardly three words. It was part of the entire directions, a part which does not seem to serve as well when dissected as when directed as a whole. My here-to-fore clear understanding of this segment was that the center of gravity of the head is forward and up of the top of the spine. Period. I never thought I had to know more than that if I were willing to trust this information and the hands of my teacher - ah! what an innocent!

How I incorporated - eek! such a physical word - that information was by visualizing the skeleton rather than a place or direction. That seemed to be a sufficient way to allow the nonessential work to drop away. In recent work with Chris Stevens, I realized that this process is both inhibitory and directive in terms of the support which actually travels through the skeleton and, only in a few cases, through muscles. (I've chatted about this before, so I will spare the details.)

And it was precisely this information that sent me away from other 'modalities' (I started this mess, too, didn't !?) which seemed intent on externalizing either my ailment or my treatment. And, somehow in that novitiate state, I viewed all of this as scientific and sensible, because, well, it's how we ARE.

If this is truly how we ARE, it doesn't matter what we DO. If we ARE somehow other, it also doesn't matter what we DO. So, if I enjoy tai chi, which I do and DO, but am aware of how I AM through the AT, it will be far more profitable than it would be otherwise. If I AM less compatible with my design, the tai chi will be less enjoyable and possibly harmful.

What I have noticed, however, is that many people come to the AT without the intention of BEING better, but of DOING better. I certainly did. So, while other 'modalities' may not achieve the same end, they may be very appropriate means to explore the benefits of the technique.

Be well,

Kay S. Hooper

Date: Fri, 19 Jun 1998 00:44:56 +0100

To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu

From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>

Subject: epistemology

Hello list,

Following my posting on "Compatibility" I have been asked to clarify what I mean by "rigorous scientific epistemology" and how the AT has been established through "objective observation and verification" in ways different from other approaches.

Epistemology is the philosophy of what counts as true, what counts as valid evidence to support claims to knowledge. It is the often implicit set of values which underlies any domain of knowledge, be it religious, scientific, personal or whatever. In the case of many religions for example, the standard by which claims of truth are judged is by referral to a sacred book. Scientific method employs a different epistemology, one in which references to the Bible, the Torah or the Koran or any other sacred text are not acceptable as evidence to support a claim to knowledge. Rather, knowledge claims are based on evidence which is objectively gathered, analysed using logical train of reasoning and theorised in the context of the body of scientific knowledge which already exists.

One of the most important words in the previous sentence is "objective". Objective evidence is that which can be operationally defined so that it can be observed and recorded by any outside person, regardless of bias. In the AT for example we can describe a faulty habit of use, and in demonstration this can be observed by a whole room full of people. We can change this habit, and again our observers can detect the change. And, when a lasting change of habit is brought about this can be correlated with improvements in health and performance, also empirically established through medical or other professional assessment.

Scientific epistemology cannot however accept subjective experience as valid evidence to support a knowledge claim. If no one else has any way to detect your spiritual experience or the movement of energy that you feel, then your claims to the existence of these events, and consequently what they mean, cannot be accepted within a scientific epistemology. This does not mean that they are false or that the accompanying theory is untrue, rather that it has not been shown to be true and until objective evidence is obtained will be treated as an unproven idea.

Alexander differs from many other approaches also in terms of verification. Scientific epistemology demands that the process by which objective evidence is gathered must be repeatable. If it worked once it must work again. If it does not then those first results must be discounted as perhaps by-products of a faulty method. Alexander Technique is as far as I am aware consistent in its repeatability. Every time you help a student to change his/her habits, the correlated areas of health and performance improve. Although I am aware that many people will claim that the AT has not worked for them, I am confident that you will find in those cases, that they have failed to put the process correctly into practice, to act

against their feelings and change their habits. I contrast this with other approaches which do not always work or which claim to work when there is no objective evidence of success.

And, in setting out his theory to account for his observations, Alexander took full account of the existing body of scientific knowledge, framing his theory in that context. His theory drew on the detailed knowledge of anatomy, but provided a larger explanation as to how all these pieces are actually co-ordinated; it embraced the laws of physics (gravity, atmospheric pressure etc); but it challenged the assumption of mind/body duality. Other approaches sometimes form a logical internal connection between all their own concepts but take insufficient account of the body of scientific knowledge that previously exists or later comes into being and are thus incompatible with it. This problem can be seen in the retreat that mainstream Christianity has been forced into on the question of the origins of man and the universe.

As a final thought on this subject, let me just say that scientific epistemology is actually somewhat more complicated than I have thus far described. In spite of its rigorous rejection of anything but objective evidence, the whole of science is in fact based on fundamental assumptions: for example the assumption that there is an objective world to be described, that everything, including this email, doesn't just exist in your head. Postmodern thinkers have also drawn attention to the fact that what poses as objectivity is often pervaded with bias, and that science can never escape this, no matter how strictly it defines its epistemology. This means that it is fundamentally imperfect, and philosophers can only wrestle with such internal inconsistencies.

I hope this has served to clarify my earlier posting and thanks to everyone for their patience in sifting through my thoughts. I look forward to your comments.

David Langstroth, david@alexandertec.u-net.com
Cardiff, Wales

Date: Thu, 18 Jun 1998 20:59:04 EDT

To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
Subject: Re: epistemology

Hello list:

An early reviewer described "Man's Supreme Inheritance" as 'common sense systemized.' (with better spelling than mine)

One of the truisms of scientific method is that "Objective observation is philosopher's make believe" (Medawar). Deconstructionists and other con men take this to mean that if objective observation doesn't exist, objective truth does not exist either and that anything anyone wants to believe is as 'true' as anything else. Of course, such a view fades quickly the farther you get from university lit. departments. The moon is, after all, NOT made of green cheese; Richard Nixon IS a crook, no matter how many New Right bullyboys declare otherwise.

One of the great things about the Technique is that it demonstrates, at the most personal level, the unreliability of subjective experience. Few philosophers seem to have considered that the 'reality' inside one's own skin cannot

be known with perfect certainty. At the same time (and by the same process) we learn some simple methods of objectively monitoring our own activity. Our objectivity, our observation, and the activity may be far from perfect, but we have standards of evaluation that coincide with the physiological facts and permit ongoing improvement.

Another point: "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." One of the problems of linking the Technique to 'other modalities' is that no evidence is extraordinary enough to support their claims. Many valid, useful, empirical PRACTICES are shackled to fanciful, authoritarian or silly THEORIES. If a therapy "works" to the satisfaction of the patient or therapist (both of whom are VERY poorly situated to make such an assesment) the theory is accepted without cavill.

It is worth noting that the scientists who have endorsed the Technique: Sherrington, Coghill, Dart, T.D.M. Roberts, Garlick etc. were the ones best equipped to find fault with Alexander's teaching on neurophysiological and anatomical terms, the Technique 'made sense' to them in the light of their knowledge in their own fields. They did not endorse Alexander on the basis of subjective relief experienced as "patients."

John Coffin

Date: Fri, 19 Jun 1998 04:35:00 +0000
From: john wynhausen <wynhaus@clandjop.com>
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
Subject: compatible epistemology

The intellectual foundation of the work is undoubtedly deep. No other modality can claim such a foundation. But lets get real. Where we live is more compost heap than colloquium.

I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but so what if feelings are unreliable! I haven't found many thoughts that were too terribly reliable either.

The way I see it is that some of us are fundamentalists and others are not. Fundamentalists seem to want the rest of us to accept their fundamentalism. A strong characteristic of us fundamentalists is our need to be right. I suspect FM addressed this question somewhere in his rightings. Didn't he say: "When you are right you won't know it and you won't care anyway." We fundamentalists couldn't possibly be right, if we were we wouldn't care as to the rightness of any other modality.

Lets briefly talk modality. For more than 99% of the world Alexander technique is a modality. It even sounds like a modality. For us chosen few who have groked the Alexandrian ontological wave....let us at least have pity and compassion for those still caught in the delusional world of modalities. It is really up to us to show the rest their way out of their dellusional perspectives. But God help us if and when we do.

I am finding Yoga to be a near perfect vehicle for teaching Alexander. First it give us something to do. Then it gives us a great deal to undo. Furthermore, Yoga seems very forgiving. I can do it all wrong and still come out feeling right. Needless to say, I like feeling right whether its reliable or not. I understand all that stuff about the unreliability of feeling when it comes to changing coordination. But how often do I really need to change my

coordination? Not too often. Most of the time my coordination gets me through things just fine.

When I want to learn to be a little less critical and a little more analytical, I turn to my experience and training in the technique. When I want to work a little easier and play a little harder, I use a little direction. I had a flash tonight about the difference between people and animals. Animals are far more honest and far better coordinated than we are. They have it all over us in those areas. They are also incredibly charming. But the main thing that people have that animals don't have is a choice in following directions. I won't vouch for the reliability of that thought but it illustrates a point am trying to make. If you follow your own direction, what need for anyone else to follow it...no need at all. In fact, if you really follow your own direction, its laughable that you would ever need to teach this stuff. Everything around you would simply fall into alignment and rhythm with you. We only need this stuff cause we aren't quite right yet. Once we're right, we won't need it anymore.

Yoga which may go back more than 2000 years seems to have grasped this basic fact and has learned to swing with it. I don't want to denigrate any of the high sounding ideas shared on this server, but really why should I care who gets helped by what as long as it doesn't keep me from knowing how to help myself.

Date: Fri, 19 Jun 1998 08:34:38 EDT
From: Robert Rickover Rrick2@aol.com
To: david@alexandertec.u-net.com,
alextech@life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: epistemology

In a message dated 6/18/98 5:47:03 PM,

David Langstroth wrote:

"In the AT for example we can describe a faulty habit of use, and in demonstration this can be observed by a whole room full of people. We can change this habit, and again our observers can detect the change. And, when a lasting change of habit is brought about this can be correlated with improvements in health and performance, also empirically established through medical or other professional assessment."

In my experience, the same can be said about lots of other modalities - at least to the same extent as is true for the AT.

"Alexander differs from many other approaches also in terms of verification. Scientific epistemology demands that the process by which objective evidence is gathered must be repeatable. If it worked once it must work again. If it does not then those first results must be discounted as perhaps by-products of a faulty method. Alexander Technique is as far as I am aware consistent in its repeatability. Every time you help a student to change his/her habits, the correlated areas of health and performance improve. Although I am aware that many people will claim that the AT has not worked for them, I am confident that you will find in those cases, that they have failed to put the process correctly into practice, to act against their feelings and change their habits. I contrast this with other approaches which do not always work or which claim to work when there is no objective evidence of success."

So if it doesn't work, it's always the student's fault? Come on! Isn't it just possible that the AT (or, at least, certain versions of the AT) doesn't work for everybody?

"And, in setting out his theory to account for his observations, Alexander took full account of the existing body of scientific knowledge, framing his theory in that context. His theory drew on the detailed knowledge of anatomy, but provided a larger explanation as to how all these pieces are actually co-ordinated; it embraced the laws of physics (gravity, atmospheric pressure etc); but it challenged the assumption of mind/body duality. Other approaches sometimes form a logical internal connection between all their own concepts but take insufficient account of the body of scientific knowledge that previously exists or later comes into being and are thus incompatible with it."

And Alexander also borrowed from lots of other (presumably end-gaining) systems that were around at the time. Every one of his "procedures" comes from somewhere else. (See "The First 43 Years of the Life of F. Matthias Alexander, Volume 2" by Joroen Staring for the well-documented details.) Also, Alexander held himself out for a time around 1900 as a teacher of the Delsarte Method - I don't know a lot about it, but I assume it would be just another "end-gaining" method in David's view. (You can read about this in Articles and Lectures published by STAT Books - even a copy of his promotional flyer!)

So...maybe the AT is not so unique after all.

Robert Rickover

Date: Fri, 19 Jun 1998 12:41:45 -0500 (CDT)
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: fhooper@postoffice.ptd.net (Fred Hooper)
Subject: Re: epistemology

Hi, all,

To quote one of my friends, "There is truth, and there is experience, and they are not always the same." Objectivity has to do with one's viewpoint as much as subjectivity, due to our inability in this realm to discern perfect truth 100% of the time. I suggest astronaut Edgar Mitchell's "The Way of the Explorer" for those who need an "objective" scientist's view on subjectivity.

As for therapies, the dreaded modalities, etc., a little info from Don Campbell's "The Mozart Effect":

"In my own professional life, I am constantly aware of the power of the mind. I remind my students, who are largely health-care professionals, teachers, and musicians, that for most reversible illnesses, 20 percent of all people get well, regardless of the system, technique or practitioner. Unfortunately, another 20 percent never get well, no matter how many systems, therapists, or, for the matter, Mozart violin concertos, they employ. My hope is to reach the 60 percent in the middle, who can benefit tremendously from music and creative arts therapies."

Of course, the obvious next question is to define "the mind".

Be well,

Kay S. Hooper

Date: Fri, 19 Jun 1998 17:11:51 EDT
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: More heat, less light
Hello list:

We need to remember that there is a difference between "disparaging modalities" and refusing to subordinate the Technique to them. This keeps us clear of any duty to be authorities on everything. Of course, a knowledge of the Technique is an enormous asset in just about any practice, but this does not make any practice we follow 'equivalent' to the technique.

When people think seriously about human activity, they tend to speak in language that Alexandrians feel kinship with. Martial arts, yoga, voice instruction and athletic coaching are all peppered with aphorisms and ideas that seem Alexandrian even if they are buried among end-gaining or superstition. (Or if Mr. Staring accuses FM of retroactively plagiarising them)

From an Alexandrian standpoint, we ARE particularly qualified to recognize end-gaining, dualism, over specification etc. This SHOULD give us a great of protection from being misidentified or co-opted.

I would like to believe that an Alexander teacher's 'outside' beliefs; in trickledown economics, subluxations, white supremacy, astrology, "New Age" (rhymes with sewage) vitalism etc. etc. would not intrude on their understanding and teaching of the Technique. This seems to be a vain hope. Subjective, irrational, authoritarian self-validating systems cannot co-exist with the kind of open, questing spirit the Technique requires; the mental gymnastics needed to protect such attitudes from contrary evidence are a constant drain on the energies of those trapped by them.

Yoga may be 2000 years old, Aikido about 75 years old. Their age or 'Asianness' has very little to do with how well they are taught, or how much we may or may not benefit from them. They are not related to the Technique, they do not 'anticipate' the Technique and the Technique is not drawn from them (sorry, Mr. Staring).

John Coffin

Sheesh, this is a messy note. Several threads at once. Lets all go to the blackboard and write 500 times: "The Alexander Technique is not a therapy. Alexander teachers don't diagnose illness. Alexander teachers don't treat illness. The Alexander Technique is not an 'alternative' to any (appropriate) treatment."

Date: Sat, 20 Jun 1998 02:02:56 +0100
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: A few responses

Hello list,

I'd like to address a few of the issues that have been raised in reply to my previous postings.

1. Robert Rickover correctly points out that Alexander wrote about applying his technique to golf. However I disagree with the argument that Robert seems

to be making that this sets the precedent to apply the technique to anything and everything. Alexander also wrote about deep breathing exercises, faith healing and hypnosis and his thesis in those cases was that they were incompatible with his technique. The difference between golf and these other examples is that golf is a game, a social activity, an entertainment, even (according to some enthusiasts) a form of artistic expression, and worthwhile pursuing for these reasons. It is not based on any intention to bring about personal change, growth or therapeutic effects. Deep breathing exercises, faith healing and hypnosis on the other hand do attempt to effect such changes through means which according Alexander's analysis are faulty. It makes no sense whatsoever to "apply" the Technique to these activities, based as they are on faulty premises, as they are unable to obtain the results they promise by the means they propose.

I would like to ask why Robert seems to think that being "flawed" indicates a failure of the technique (Who among us is not flawed?). Alexander did not hold himself up as a finished pinnacle of perfection, but rather as change in process. To "have" the technique is to have the means to work on yourself and to change over a lifetime. Alexander was a good example of this, asserting even at the end of his life that he dare not stop working on himself. I would also be interested to hear how Robert thinks that Alexander "could have benefitted from (gasp!) therapy".

Finally Robert has misinterpreted my thoughts about instances where people will claim that the Technique has failed to work for them. I still maintain that you will find in those cases that they have failed to put the process correctly into practice, to act against their feelings and change their habits. I did not say this was all the student's fault. It's just as likely to be the result of poor teaching.

2. Nancy Lebovitz is right to point out that I have left out of my posting on "epistemology" any mention of "practical, rule-of-thumb, semi-traditional methods of doing things." Certainly they represent a "common sense" basis for knowledge and there may be much truth in them, but remember that they have also produced such gems as "the earth is the centre of the universe" and "my feelings are reliable".

3. In his comments John Wynhausen raises the notion of fundamentalism and the idea that we ought not to be telling others what to do. Certainly I agree with the latter, and if anyone has misinterpreted my postings as attempts to tell people what to do then this is unfortunate. Rather, my intentions are to engage in a reasoned debate about where the Technique fits in the world today. Naturally this entails criticism of positions which are logically untenable. What you do is your own business.

As to "fundamentalism" this is an inaccurate word to describe a position in a debate about Alexander. According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary fundamentalism is "Strict adherence to traditional orthodox tenets held to be fundamental to the Christian faith". There are no alternative definitions. Even though modern usage has expanded this definition it retains a connotation of fanaticism, and of being out of touch with one's reasoning.

David Langstroth, david@alexandertec.u-net.com
Cardiff, Wales

Date: June 20, 1998

To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu

From: David Gorman alextech@compuserve.com

Subject: re: Epistemology et al.

Hi all,

I have been following this thread and there is so much I would like to respond to, but as all my thoughts revolve around the same issue, I shall just choose one part of one post in order to get started:

In a message dated 6/18/98 9:01 PM, John Coffin wrote:
"One of the great things about the Technique is that it demonstrates, at the most personal level, the unreliability of subjective experience."

This, of course, depends a great deal on what you mean by 'experience'. So often Alexander people think it is the senses that are unreliable and therefore that their experience is unreliable. In the "unreliable sensory appreciation, it is "unreliable appreciation" not "unreliable senses". There is nothing at all unreliable about the senses--in fact there is very important--dare I say essential--information in our experiences. The problem is that we are interpreting the feelings in a faulty (or misconceived or delusional) way. That is all.

Take the experience that so many people have had of thinking that they are standing upright then, after some work from an Alexander teacher, they feel pitched forward and almost falling forward--so much so that they often 'correct' for this and return to their usual 'upright' standing. Telling the pupil that their subjective experience is unreliable at best only makes their learning unnecessarily difficult. Better by far that we help them understand what they are in fact experiencing so that they can learn how their 'experiential' system does work.

In the case of my example above, they need to understand that any on-going posture will come to feel 'normal' and 'upright' if it is held as a fixed way of being for a period of time. Our senses don't tell us ABSOLUTELY where we are in space, but RELATIVELY how our relationship to space and support is changing. When the teacher brings about a change which is obvious to the 'outsider' is more upright but which the pupil feels as bent forward and falling, there is important information there. The misinterpretation on the pupil's part is that these feelings are describing the position of the moment. They are not and never will. The feelings are ACCURATELY describing the change that took place. The pupil is indeed bent forward RELATIVE to where they were before (which was bent backward).

The pupil was also more fixed (especially in his or her legs) as one has to be to maintain such a backward bend. After the change he/she is now more free because he is, in fact, more upright and less holding is needed. However he don't feel it this way. He feels 'as if' he is falling (and reacts accordingly) because his APPRECIATION (or interpretation) of the 'bent forward' feeling as being where he actually is in space at the moment combines with the 'freedom' feeling to make him feel 'as if' he was falling, when, in fact, he is actually not moving at all.

If we (as teachers) know that this is how the system works, we will be able to invite him or her not to react in that moment of her 'interpretation' and instead allow herself to recognize what is really happening. Moments go by and she has not hit the ground so she cannot be falling. The

mirror can show that she is not bent forward at all. Faced with these new 'facts' which violate her usual 'appreciation', she can begin to realize what the actual message is from her senses.

This actual message--the reason why we actually are able to feel our sensory experience--is not to give us a description of our current place in space as we thought. It is to show how we have changed. We are now much freer THAN BEFORE and much more forward THAN BEFORE.

Now, often people with their end-gaining interpretations will take that as something to work toward, thereby ending up further and further forward in an attempt to recapture the feeling. But the real point of that original sensory experience is that it is very very ACCURATELY revealing to the pupil what was happening posturally the moment before--he was leaning MUCH MORE back and was MUCH MORE fixed than he is now.

Take another very common example. That of people who feel it takes effort to stand up from the chair. They are definitely experiencing effort and their APPRECIATION of that sensory experience is that the effort is what is getting them out of the chair. They will usually be utterly convinced that they cannot get up without that effort ! However, when they have the experience of getting out of the chair with no effort at all, they are amazed. Often they are convinced that the teacher must have lifted them because 'someone' must have done the effort.

But we miss the learning opportunities if we just try to teach them to inhibit and direct and achieve that 'better use' without the 'end-gaining' effort. They will have failed to understand that the reason they got out of the chair so easily was NOT because they were now inhibiting or directing or lengthening or that their necks were free. They got out of the chair so easily because that is SIMPLY WHAT HAPPENS when a human is not interfering by getting in their own way and trying to 'do' it. Some people (not to mention animals and little kids) move like this all the time because they never have become stuck in interfering. If we help them understand their experience they will realize that they did not 'do' anything to get up--it just happened that easily when they stopped doing their 'trying' to get up, which they were convinced they had to do simply because they'd always felt the effort and identified it as what was getting them up.

Like my example above, we can also help them realize that they had completely mis-appreciated their previous feeling of effort. It was manifestly NOT what was getting them up. When they stopped trying 'to get up' they came up MORE EASILY. Therefore, how is it possible to interpret that feeling as "what it takes to get up", when it is much more obvious that it is the feeling of how much they were working against themselves? A valuable bit of information if there ever was one.

If a person does understand (in the biggest sense of the word) what these experiences are signifying, they will not be feeling that their EXPERIENCES are unreliable and will not be expecting some new and better Alexander experiences which hopefully someday they can count on. They will instead, be living in a different reality whereby, if they should happen to have the same experience while standing, they will recognize it as working against themselves rather than their old idea of the effort necessary to get up. That is, they will be well on their way

to a reliable sensory appreciation--which is not some far-off holy grail of Alexanderhood, but a quite directly achievable change within some few dozens of lessons.

I could go on and on with many more examples of the actual feelings (read interpretations) people have and how a teacher who has seen through them can help a pupil re-interpret them to understand better how things work. That is, to show how the exact same feeling was not at all 'unreliable' (as in not-to-be-paid-attention-to), but rather carried essential information for understanding what is going on. IT IS THE INTERPRETATION THAT IS UNRELIABLE, NOT THE FEELING.

Our wonderful millions-of-years-evolved systems having been sending us these important messages all our lives; most of the time we've just been wanting to shoot the messenger and get to a better feeling that we like. Instead, what we need is to GET THE MESSAGE--because all too often we are having the experience but completely missing the meaning. And this goes not just for all our pre-Alexander experiences, but all of the Alexander experiences too if we have not come to a reliable appreciation of what we are actually feeling. By the way, this understanding radically changes the process (or form) of the work, since it no longer so necessary to 'give' new experiences to the pupil so that they have a contrast or a sense of 'better use', when we can help someone make sense of the experiences they are already having--every day.

Looked at this way, it is possible to go further than Alexander's phrase of "unreliable SENSORY appreciation" and recognize that what it is really that we are caught in is an "unreliable REALITY appreciation". In other words, the way we see things is a delusion. Our constructs, or belief systems are faulty, not our bodies. Faulty is not even the best word here at all. INACCURATE is a much better word. The real learning involved is in coming to new understandings, so that we don't end up 'solving' our problems, we end up in living in a whole new reality.

It got very interesting to me as I began years ago to follow through the various 'appreciations' that I had inherited throughout my life including the ones I'd got from my Alexander training and teaching. Over the years, as I began to explore my own and others' experiences and see the 'constructs' or belief systems that they imply, it became apparent that there are numerous of these 'inaccuracies' (or faulty appreciations or misconceptions) within the traditional Alexander viewpoint of how we see people's problems are and what we see as the solution to help them.

The biggest of these centres around the idea that people have 'unconscious' habits like pulling their heads back that they do not know that they are doing. But before I just leap into this, I am aware that I am treading on thin ground as to how all this might be received. I have babbled on long enough for this posting and would rather sound out the waters before proceeding. I would be very happy to go on if there seems to be true interest in looking at what we do and whether, in fact, our deeply held 'Alexander' way of seeing things is true. I hope you will forgive my reticence to just carry on, but I have had some unfortunate experiences with people who did not like to have their beliefs challenged and I do not wish to repeat them.

As David Langstroth said, "Scientific method employs a different epistemology, one in which references to the Bible, the Torah or the Koran or any other sacred text are not acceptable as evidence to support a claim to knowledge." We must, of course, include here Alexander's books. As David also said, anyone can only claim the Technique is 'true' if they take account of the body of knowledge that previously exists or later comes into being and if, of course, the Technique remains compatible with this new knowledge.

Don't get me wrong. I think Alexander was a genius and moved the state of our understanding forward a huge step from that of the times around him in the first half of this century. He himself seems to have thought there was a lot of room for improvement and often seems to have said that he wasn't happy with the way he was able to express things and that he'd just started a "new field of enquiry" that he hoped others would carry on and take it even further.

As you know, this forum is set up so that if you just hit your email REPLY button your reply goes only to the person who sent the original message. If anyone in this forum is interested in hearing any more, I would appreciate it if they let me know in a posting to the whole forum rather than privately. I too shall post my reply to the whole forum. This way everyone can see what is happening and everyone can join in.

warmly,
David

Date: Fri, 19 Jun 1998 19:40:38 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: epistemology, sensory appreciation

Hello David,

May I thank you for your well-thought contribution. I would like to complement it with another quote from Mr Alexander -- one of my favourites -- in which I think he gets closest to what you wrote in the following passage:

I could go on and on with many more examples of the actual feelings (read interpretations) people have and how a teacher who has seen through them can help a pupil re-interpret them to understand better how things work. That is, to show how the exact same feeling was not at all 'unreliable' (as in not-to-be-paid-attention-to), but rather carried essential information for understanding what is

going on. IT IS THE INTERPRETATION THAT IS UNRELIABLE, NOT THE FEELING. Our wonderful millions-of-years-evolved systems having been sending us these important messages all our lives; most of the time we've just been wanting to shoot the messenger and get to a better feeling that we like. Instead, what we need is to GET THE MESSAGE--because all too often we are having the experience but completely missing the meaning. And this goes not just for all our pre-Alexander experiences, but all of the Alexander experiences too if we have not come to a reliable appreciation of what we are actually feeling. By the way, this understanding radically changes the process (or form) of the work, since it no longer so necessary to 'give' new experiences to the pupil so that they have a contrast or a sense of 'better use', when we

can help someone make sense of the experiences they are already having--every day.

Looked at this way, it is possible to go further than Alexander's phrase of "unreliable SENSORY appreciation" and recognize that what it is really that we are caught in is an "unreliable REALITY appreciation". In other words, the way we see things is a delusion. Our constructs, or belief systems are faulty, not our bodies. Faulty is not even the best word here at all. INACCURATE is a much better word. The real learning involved is in coming to new understandings, so that we don't end up 'solving' our problems, we end up in living in a whole new reality.

Now, let's see what FM wrote and take our time to analyze it. It maybe a bit challenging, but I think it's worth both time and effort. I've structured it into paragraphs and left some things out on purpose; if you want to read it in full beauty, it appears on p. 20 of CCC 1946 (the emphases are Alexander's, my comments are in square brackets).

"... if ... all so-called mental processes are mainly the result of sensory experiences ..., it will be obvious that in our conception of how to employ the different parts of the mechanism in the acts of everyday life WE ARE INFLUENCED CHIEFLY BY SENSORY PROCESSES (feeling). ... in every case, the nature of our response, WHETHER IT BE AN ACTUAL MOVEMENT, AN EMOTION OR AN OPINION, will depend upon the associated activity of the processes concerned with conception [oops! Did someone expect this?] and with the sensory and other mechanisms [I wonder what these might be?] responsible for the "feeling" which we experience. [Note the quotation marks.] This associated activity is referred to throughout my work as SENSORY APPRECIATION."

I think this is a brilliant definition anyway, but the reason why I put it onto the forum is to ask: do you think -- as I do -- that it could be that by the phrase "and other mechanisms" FM just tried to put into words the concept of "belief structure" that you mentioned and which wasn't known at FM's time?

Let me see your comments. And thank you again, David
Peter Ruhrberg

Date: Sat, 20 Jun 1998 18:00:30 -0500 (CDT)
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: fhooper@postoffice.ptd.net (Fred Hooper)
Subject: re: epistemology et al.

Hello, David,

Thanks for putting so much time and effort into your response. It is always interesting to me that the most thoughtful posts are in response to what we consider to be most basic to the technique, like "forward and up" and Primary What-ever-you-want-to-call-it.

David Gorman wrote:

"The biggest of these centres around the idea that people have 'unconscious' habits like pulling their heads back that they do not know that they are doing. But before I just leap into this, I am aware that I am treading on thin ground as to how all this might be received. I have babbled on long enough for this posting and would rather sound out the waters before proceeding. I would be very happy to go on

if there seems to be true interest in looking at what we do and whether, in fact, our deeply held 'Alexander' way of seeing things is true. I hope you will forgive my reticence to just carry on, but I have had some unfortunate experiences with people who did not like to have their beliefs challenged and I do not wish to repeat them."

I, for one, would be very interested in this topic.

Be well,

Kay S. Hooper

Date: Sat, 20 Jun 1998 20:11:08 -0400
To: alextech@compuserve.com,
alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: Nancy Lebovitz <nancyl@universe.digex.net>
Subject: re: epistemology et al.

I'd definitely like to see whatever more you'd like to say.

Nancy Lebovitz

Date: Sat, 20 Jun 1998 23:39:54 -0300
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
From: Franklin Serrano <franklin.s@openlink.com.br>
Subject: please go on

Dear Mr Gorman

I am just a student not a teacher and am fascinated by this discussion. Please continue . I have read a few of your articles and I think that from my very precarious knowledge of the technique that you are the at teacher I know who is closer to Alexander's attitude of moving our understanding "forward and up". Please don't be inhibited (ouch ! that was an awful pun..)

yours sincerely

franklin

Date: Sun, 21 Jun 1998 14:10:55 EDT
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Re: "Feelings"

Hello list: and David

I think the point you may be missing is this: however reliable our senses may be (and they are pretty damn reliable for us to bumble through life as well as we do) NO ONE has "sensory experience" free of "appreciation." It is a reminder of FM's exhausting thoroughness that he used the term "sensory appreciation" so constantly. I think that the term 'sensory appreciation' has the added advantage of including the matter of anticipation; e.g. not being able to rise from the chair until the expected level of tension is reached.

There seems to be something circular about stating that "There is nothing at all unreliable about the senses -- We just don't know what they tell us." I also have trouble conceiving how the pupil's senses can be "ACCURATELY describing the change that took place." if the pupil has no conscious register of where the movement began or ended.

It is a wonderful point that our sensorium is committed to registering CHANGE rather than steady states. Those 'sensory deprivation' flotation tanks from the 70's illustrate the point: with tactile input and 'relational' muscular activity brought to a minimum, the subject's sensory experience is taken way out of normal bounds.

I am disturbed by this passage also:

"the reason they got out of the chair so easily was NOT because they were now inhibiting or directing or lengthening or that their necks were free. They got out of the chair so easily because that is SIMPLY WHAT HAPPENS when a human is not interfering by getting in their own way and trying to 'do' it."

'Not interfering by getting in their own way and trying to "do" it.' and 'inhibiting or directing or lengthening or that their necks were free' are the SAME THING, although the second is an example of Alexander jargon run amok.

One great advantage we have when we teach is that however strange or wrong the pupil's new experiences are; the new experience is brought about by the improved functioning of primary control. There is an element of 'rightness' in the new experience (freedom, lightness, comfort etc.) which goes a long way to relieving the fear that the 'strange,' 'off balance' aspects may bring up.

On your reply to David Langstroth: of course we don't want to invest FM's books with liturgical authority, they are rich in errors and flaws. In refusing to make Alexander a guru or 'exalted master' we are adhering to his own wishes. Let's not turn around and put someone else in that place either. The work of great teachers like Barstow and Macdonald is diminished when we become cultish 'disciples' instead of students.

John Coffin

Date: June 22, 1998, 4:09 PM
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
Subject: re: Epistemology et al.

Thanks for everyone who responded encouraging me to go on. I'm at work on it at the moment and will post in a day or so, when it seems that what I've written is clear (at least to me).

One quick response to John C who wrote:

"I think the point you may be missing is this: however reliable our senses may be (and they are pretty damn reliable for us to bumble through life as well as we do) NO ONE has "sensory experience" free of "appreciation." ... There seems to be something circular about stating that 'There is nothing at all unreliable about the senses-We just don't know what they tell us.'"

This is precisely the point that I was making. That once we realize that it is the appreciation which is unreliable, we are in different position than if we think that the senses are unreliable. Then the issue is to understand what they really are telling us, rather than ignore them because they might lead us astray...

Since John invokes Alexander mentioning sensory appreciation, I'll respond in kind from Alexander's Constructive Conscious Control, preface xxiv, [Capitalization is mine not Alexander's]:

"Certain it is that without the functioning of the human sensorium this registration would not be possible, and hence it will be seen how all essential it is that the human sensorium should function as a reliable register in order to minimize the effect of SENSORY ILLUSION IN THE FORMING AND ASSESSING THE VALIDITY OF THE BELIEFS UPON WHICH OUR JUDGMENT OF REALITY DEPENDS."

It is this forming and assessing the validity of the beliefs upon which our judgement of reality depends that I am going to write about. Stay tuned...

best,

David

Date: Mon, 22 Jun 1998 11:54:27 +0100
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: To David Gorman

Dear David,

Allow me to add my encouragement to those who have asked you to write on and expand your ideas. I welcome an enthusiastic contribution from all quarters.

I understand your sensitivity to having your beliefs challenged but this is what we must all expect when we choose to publicly air our thoughts. Without having fully heard you out I cannot promise that I will not challenge your ideas. However, let me assure you that I deplore personal attacks, insinuation, or character assassination of any form equally as much as I deplore sycophancy or guru worship.

I would like to think that a forum such as this can be a venue for the reasoned and robust debate of ideas.

with respect,

David Langstroth

Date: June 22, 1998, 4:09 PM
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
Subject: re: To David Gorman

David Langstroth wrote:

"Dear David, Allow me to add my encouragement to those who have asked you to write on and expand your ideas. I welcome an enthusiastic contribution from all quarters. I understand your sensitivity to having your beliefs challenged but this is what we must all expect when we choose to publicly air our thoughts."

Thanks for your encouragement.

I feel I must add that my reticence was not to having MY beliefs challenged--I love that. That is how I grow..

It was from my experiences of how people have reacted when THEIR beliefs were challenged... However, enough of this. I do not wish to seem coy in promising my reply and then not delivering, so... back to writing,

until then,

David

Date: Mon, 22 Jun 1998 18:55:23 EDT
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
To: alextech@compuserve.com,
alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: epistemology et al
Hello list: and David

Yes, we are saying the same thing, at least sort of. I too, am opposed to the relentless 'sensory nihilism' of teachers who hammer into their students the idea that they are not supposed to 'feel' anything. How are they supposed to do that? A novocaine drip into their muscles?

Pulling the quote from my head, in Use of the Self ch.1: "Surely if feeling could become unreliable it should be possible to make it reliable again." (Or something very like that) Certainly in the process of learning the Technique, we come more and more to 'feel upright and balanced' when we actually ARE.

On the philosophical front I try to put it like this: "Certainly we are always capable of misinterpreting experience, jumping to conclusions, clinging to prejudices etc. etc. But we CAN improve, especially in the nuts and bolts of our daily 'psycho-physical' conduct. Indeed we can expect to reach a point where our sense of ourselves in action can be described as 'accurate.' Certainly accurate enough for real life."

John Coffin

Date: Tue, 23 Jun 1998 02:28:41 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: To David Gorman

Hello David,

"I feel I must add that my reticence was not to having MY beliefs challenged--I love that. That is how I grow.. It was from my experiences of how people have reacted when THEIR beliefs were challenged... However, enough of this. I do not wish to seem coy in promising my reply and then not delivering, so... back to writing"

I'm glad to hear that you decide to go on to share your contributions with the rest of us. Whatever people do in response to what you say is (to borrow David Langstroth's phrase) their own business and reflects -- and often reveals -- more about them as it does about you. It is the old phenomenon of what is known in philosophy and rhetorics as "argumentum ad hominem", of attacking the person instead dealing with the ideas. It has a long, unfortunate history and some people still haven't learned the lesson from it.

(I, for instance, see that the majority of my pupils don't agree with me on almost everything right away. But it doesn't stop me from saying what I believe is true and what I know is helpful, because it was helpful not only to me, but without exception to all people who tried it out consistently. If in any particular instance I am really dead wrong, one thing I can be sure of is that they will tell me during the course of their following experiments, and in this way I can learn from them. There is nothing I can lose in teaching.)

On the other hand, as you will perhaps know, the manner of other people's response doesn't make the thing that you said more or less "true". That is to say other people may react in whatever way they want to -- they might be right or wrong in their opinion, as you might be in yours.

The point here is: I think that the majority of the thoughts someone expresses should be at least reasonable and make sense, and that the arguments should be compelling enough for the readers to reconsider his/her opinion. (Just open any page of any book of Mr Alexander and see how brilliantly and beautifully he accomplishes this task almost every time!)

Now just think of an assessment, argument or opinion which is mistaken or inconsistent. We all have seen them, we all have made them. It is not only unavoidable, it is necessary for learning. In fact, I'm glad to see the most successful people in the world say that mistakes and errors are the best thing that can happen to us. The process our greatest achievers went through (including FM Alexander, see "Evolution of a Technique") were filled with mistakes. They used their mistakes to learn from, then continued to make more mistakes to learn from them even more, and so on.

But even if an argument turns out to be false, if it was presented in such a way that 1) the procedure by which the argument was made and 2) the ways in which the decisions were reached are clear enough, then we all can see where the error came from, and we then can let that knowledge help us in improving our skills in thinking and reasoning if it comes to assess other beliefs, including our own.

If a teacher really does his/her job, it doesn't matter whether s/he is right or wrong in a specific assessment. We all are, we all will.

Cheerfully
Peter

Date: Tue, 23 Jun 1998 09:41:41 -0400 (EDT)
From: Patrick Snook <patrick.snook@yale.edu>
To: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com> cc: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: re: epistemology et al

In this matter of sensory appreciation: Macdonald's book mentions his "trick" for pointing out to a pupil two ways of feeling. He would touch the pupil's shoulder, without warning, and then ask if he felt it, and then ask if he tried to feel it. It seems to me that whenever the business of "feeling" comes into discussion of the AT, the second kind of feeling illustrated in Macdonald's example takes precedence. In reality, that kind of feeling is a kind of groping, or grasping, and surely interferes with the real business of feeling, which is more like the noticing or sensing of the first kind (in Macdonald's example, again). If I understand it correctly (and please, someone, straighten me on this matter if I've twisted away from the truth), "feeling" takes time to register, and the trick is not to interfere with the mechanisms (neural, nervous, whatever) that communicate the feeling to the conscious mind.

This supports David Gorman's assertion--although he didn't use quite these words--that the mechanism of feeling works just fine, so long as we allow it to do what it

does, so we can “appreciate” (gain in value, and understand) what the sense tells us, and prevent interference (by groping, or grasping at feelings . . . in effect, guessing). Although I have just referred to feeling, this surely applies to all the senses (if we take as axiomatic that the part always affects the whole).

Patrick Snook

Date: Tue, 23 Jun 1998 11:16:20
To: <alextech@compuserve.com> Cc: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
From: Ian Kleiman <ikleiman@kleiman.com>
Subject: re: re: epistemology et al

At 09:41 AM 6/23/98 -0400, Patrick Snook wrote:
“In this matter of sensory appreciation: Macdonald’s book mentions his “trick” for pointing out to a pupil two ways of feeling. He would touch the pupil’s shoulder, without warning, and then ask if he felt it, and then ask if he tried to feel it. It seems to me that whenever the business of “feeling” comes into discussion of the AT, the second kind of feeling illustrated in Macdonald’s example takes precedence. In reality, that kind of feeling is a kind of groping, or grasping, and surely interferes with the real business of feeling, which is more like the noticing or sensing of the first kind (in Macdonald’s example, again).”

Indeed. In basic buddhist psychology, this is called “greed” or “grasping” and it is identified as a “mental impulse”. There is also the opposite kind of reaction of trying to not have a feeling, to push it away...this is called “fear” or “aversion” by the buddhists. Both of them tend to obscure and/or suppress the original feeling/sensation.

So, in that model, there is the message that enters the senses, followed by the feeling/perception (which will always arise)...which stimulates the reaction (fear or aversion). Mindfulness (inhibition?) observes the reactive mind creating the reaction impulses, but decides not to act out the impulse, but to watch it run its course until the mind can see the original feeling more clearly which then becomes a changing field of perception/feeling over time.

I find it amazing how AT has helped me to understand this, and then going back to review the satipathan sutra, how these observations are so similar.

Ian

Date: Tue, 23 Jun 1998 19:44:39 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: =?ISO-8859-1?Q?To_Patrick_Snook,_FMA_quote_=22belief=22?=
Hello Patrick,

I have found three references, the first of which is FMA verbatim, and the third is more of an interpretation.

1. Do you know what we have found that belief is? A certain standard of muscle tension. That is all. (The Bedford Lecture, in “Articles and Lectures”, p.174)

2. I remember one morning his coming briskly into our classroom, looking very pleased with himself, and saying, ‘Belief is a matter of customary muscle tension.’

‘F.M.,’ I said, ‘don’t you mean that belief about what you can do with the body is a matter of customary muscle tension?’ The discussion was on. He kept talking while he worked. Finally at the end of the morning’s work F.M. said, ‘Yes, belief about what you can do with the body is a matter of customary muscle tension.’ (Lulie Westfeldt, F. Matthias Alexander, The Man and his Work, Mouritz 1998, p.68, see there for further details of her assessment.)

3. Was FM’s aphorism that belief is a matter of muscle tension simply designed to shock people, or was there a more serious element behind it? He was perfectly serious about it, because he equated belief with fixation. In his experience a rigidity of mind corresponded to a rigidity of body. (Walter Carrington on the Alexander Technique in discussion with Sean Carey, 1986, p.45f)

Date: Tue, 23 Jun 1998 20:30:59 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: epistemology, sensory appreciation

Dear all,

May I just throw into the discussion how FM describes his own view about “sensory appreciation” with regard to what we call “feeling” or “feeling sense”:

“Sensory appreciation, from our point of view, has a much wider significance than is generally attributed to it. But ..., TAKEN EVEN IN THE MOST LIMITED SENSE, it includes all sensory experiences which are conveyed through the channels of sight, hearing, touch, feeling, equilibrium, movement, etc., and which are responsible for psycho-physical action and reaction throughout the organism.

“If we raise an arm, move a leg, or if we make any other movements of the body or limbs, we are guided chiefly by our sensory appreciation or, AS MOST PEOPLE WOULD PUT IT, by our sense of feeling.” (CCC 1923 p.34 / 1946 p.20, emphasis mine)

You will see sometimes FM in his writings substituting “feeling” for “sensory appreciation” and sometimes putting them closely together. For instance, on p.15 of CCC 1946 you will find three times the combination “feeling (sensory appreciation)”.

But remember every time you come across one of these “feeling” substitutions that, even if you include “all sensory experiences which are conveyed through the channels of sight, hearing, touch, feeling, equilibrium, movement, etc.”, you would enjoy FM’s concept of “sensory appreciation” in its most limited sense.

I also think that FM in the second paragraph bows to common usage when he says that MOST PEOPLE would use the phrase “sense of feeling”, but that FM doesn’t want to simply equate “sense of feeling” and “sensory appreciation.”

Besides, I have also some serious doubt if it is possible in a physiological sense to guide oneself by “feeling” at all, and there are some really exciting passages in FM’s writings which certainly question at least some of our beliefs about this issue.

Peter Ruhrberg

Date 25 June 1998, 6:48pm
From: David Gorman alextech@compuserve.com
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: On Belief Systems and Learning

June 24, 1998

To all on the Alextech forum,

Here at long last is my go at explaining what I have discovered. I have recently been in the middle of writing a lot around the same territory so this will be a sort of 'dry run' for publishing. Forgive me, but it has taken me a while and it has become a 'wee bit' longer than I first expected, but it takes what it takes, I guess.

I am sending this piece in three parts so as to not overwhelm anyone's e-mail software. Mine just chops messages it thinks are too long...

I have been very encouraged by the attitude of all the various responses from members of this list interested in hearing more. Some of the responses I received, I gather, were sent to me privately.

To find a group here (or at least a number of individuals) who are eager and interested in exploring any and all ideas openly is a decided treat. I am grateful for your interest and encouragement AND I welcome any and all responses, criticisms, refutations, suggestions, etc.

David, in the sunny south of France

This is Part 1 of 3

ON BELIEF SYSTEMS AND LEARNING

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[the original posting had a mistake saying Copyright 1988]

David Langstroth wrote on June 22nd:

"The important point for this forum is that the Alexander Technique, like most practical bodies of knowledge, is BASED ON the assumption of the existence of objective reality. It is only WITHIN this assumption that you can speak meaningfully about the technique." [capitals are his]

This is certainly true. As he says, if we didn't assume there actually was some sort of reality outside of our interpretations, there wouldn't be much point in talking of anything.

It is not so much this fundamental assumption but rather our assumptions of the particular 'objective reality' and premises of the Alexander Technique that my experiences eventually have brought me to question. Though in the end, these new experiences and my understanding of them brought me to a very different sense of what that outside reality might be.

I'll tell the story as much as possible from the chronology of my own realizations, because that is the way it happened and for someone else to follow the same pathway is often the best way to get to the same place.

Let me start with a very brief outline of the general assumptions and premises of the Alexander Technique. Note that I am not trying to be exact here but just to give a general flavour of the Technique to make sense out of what follows. Of course, the

Alexander Technique has many strands, but near as I can tell, having got around in these different strands quite a bit over the last 25 years, the common basic ideas behind the Technique go something like this (substitute your own details to suit yourself):

People go around in their daily lives and do all their activities within their usual habits or 'manner of use'. They go to do an activity like stand up from a chair (or recite Shakespeare) and, in doing so, they habitually pull their heads back and shorten their backs (or some other such habit). They don't know that they are doing this because it is an 'unconscious habit' that has come to feel 'instinctively right', but Alexander teachers, can show them with their hands or with a mirror that they are, in fact, doing these things. These kinds of unconscious habits are called 'misuses of the self' and these misuses 'affect functioning', sometimes quite soon (e.g. cause neck tension, effort), sometimes after a period of consistent 'misuse' (e.g. hoarse voice, lower back or disk problems, etc.). They also bring about a general tendency to poor health in indirect ways.

Part of the job of teachers is to help the pupil become aware of these 'misuses' (these unconscious habits) so that they can inhibit them and direct (or re-direct if you like) to allow the neck to free, to allow the head to go forward and up and the back to lengthen and widen (or some similarly expansive directions).

It was particularly around the part about having these unconscious habits where we are doing things like pulling our heads back and shortening but do not know that we are doing them that I first began to question.

I was working one day (many years ago) with a young man and going about things more or less in the way described above. He had just stood up from the chair and (from my 'trained' point of view) had pulled his head way back like so many do. I said to him, "Were you aware that you pulled your head back when you stood up?"

He looked at me and said very definitely, "No, I didn't!"

"Let's stand up again and I can show you in the mirror that you did," I replied confidently.

"Oh, I'm sure that it happened," he said, equally definitely, "But, I didn't do it."

It suddenly struck me that what he had said was completely true. It was obvious that his head came back (something he wasn't disputing in this case), but, of course, HE DID NOT DO IT in the sense of saying to himself, "Hmm, now I'm going to pull my head back to stand up."

Equally obvious to me was that normally I would get busy showing him the 'fact' of his head coming back as he stood and then further convincing him that he was actually doing it, but as an unconscious habit or misuse which was why he didn't know that he was doing it. Then we'd get further involved in helping him to inhibit this 'unconscious habit' in order to prevent it and so on... And of course we'd do this because I already KNEW through my training and teaching experience that this is what was happening.

All well and good so far. But what also suddenly struck me in that same moment was that, if he, the person, WAS NOT pulling his head back, WHAT WAS HE ACTUALLY UP TO in those moments when his head was going back?

At the same time, I realized that BECAUSE we'd normally both get busy with making conscious the 'unconscious habit' and then inhibiting and directing (with me guiding his movements and 'giving' him new experiences, etc.), neither of us would normally EVER FIND OUT what he was doing. In fact, because I ALREADY KNEW what was happening, I normally wouldn't even think to ask the question...

However, the question HAD NOW occurred to me and I was determined to find out just what were people up to when these events we call 'misuses' where occurring? That is, what they were up to in their 'world' (how they saw things from their point of view) while I (in my 'trained' world) was seeing their 'misuses' and 'unconscious habits'.

It was a quite exciting prospect--a "whole new field of endeavour" I thought. I also thought it might take me a while to tease out what was happening to/for people, but it turned out to be a lot easier and faster than I thought.

I decided to take the most direct route I could think of which was to simply stop people in the middle of any activity when those 'misuses' (heads pulling back, backs shortening, etc.) were most noticeably happening, and then immediately ask them where they were in their attention, what were they thinking, feeling, intending, etc.

I also realized quickly that I would need to carry out this experiment only with quite new pupils if I was going to find out what they were up to in their 'normal' or 'natural' habits, because once they'd had a few lessons, what they were up to (at least in the lesson situation) was what their teacher(s) had taught them to be up to.

Initially, I was using those common Alexander activities of standing and sitting from chairs and bending, but later on things got even more interesting when I explored with people what they were up to in activities where they themselves noticed they had problems--playing their violin, caught in an argument with their partners, and so on. But it will make more sense to stay with the order in which it came to me.

As we began to explore, it took a while for each person to understand what I was asking of them in those moments when I stopped them. They were so used to just doing what they were doing, and thinking and feeling what they were thinking and feeling, that they just took it for granted and had never thought to articulate it. However, they soon got the hang of it and within the first few weeks of exploring, certain patterns were starting to emerge.

The first I noticed was in standing when I'd stop people at that point just when they were about to 'lift off' the chair and their 'thigh-tightening', 'head-pulling-back' and 'back-arching/shortening' was usually at its most prominent. The most common thing people reported when asked where they were and what they were up to, was that they were way out ahead of themselves with their awareness on where they were trying to get to.

The same sort of thing happened when they sat down. Almost as soon as they started to sit, they'd be already on the chair in their attention--where they were 'present'. It also happened when they were standing and went to pick up a pen from the floor. When I saw them, from my point of view, 'pull their heads way back', 'stiffen their legs' and 'bend in their lower backs', they were reporting that 'they

were way out with the pen and their hand and their intention "to reach for it."

Ah, I thought. Of course! This was familiar. They were out ahead of themselves. They were end-gaining. I sort-of already knew that (as some of you may now be saying, "of course, that's obvious"). They were way out ahead, closer to their intended future goal than where they were in space at the moment. In my teaching, I'd just never seen it that way, from their point of view, even though I, myself, had had the same habits and experiences as a student not so many years before.

So far this was all, for me, still quite within the context of the Alexander premises. I was just seeing (I thought at the time) more clearly how the pupil's conception and end-gaining brought about the misuses of his or her self (the head pulling back, etc.).

But then I realized why people with these habits were not aware of their heads pulling back and such like. They weren't at all aware of what was happening in their 'body' because they weren't there! They were way out ahead paying attention to something else--namely, where they were trying to get to.

No wonder all these 'misuses' went unnoticed... What the actual conscious, feeling, thinking human being was doing was "reaching out to get up", or "going down to the chair." Their own words said it all. It just so happened that when the human went about things that way, the result was all these physical reactions which they were not specifically aware of (though, of course, they did feel them in a general way as the effort and strain of standing).

Now I really understood what my pupil had meant when he said that HE wasn't pulling his head back. He was absolutely right. What he WAS doing, though, was rushing out ahead of himself to get up--something he'd always figured he had to do in order to get up, and something he always experienced the same way thereby reinforcing his sense that he had to do it.

This got me thinking. Which was 'primary': the 'unconscious habits' of misuse that I was seeing from the outside, or the beliefs and the particular intentions and acts of the human being on the inside who was doing the standing? By primary, I mean, was one more the cause and the other more the secondary effect? Or maybe they were simultaneous? Which did it make most sense to work with? Obviously the more primary one, whichever that was. Certainly, how I was trained and how I had been working up to that point was to ignore what the human beings WERE ACTUALLY UP TO and instead get them to inhibit something that they, the conscious human beings, WERE NOT ACTUALLY UP TO.

So, with this question in mind I carried on and decided to see how closely the onset of these 'misuses' (which were 'objectively' seen by me) correlated with people's inner experience and way of going about things. Specifically, I wondered what the person was up to at the very start of the 'misuse' pattern as detected by me--in other words which was first and therefore primary.

So, for a while, we spent time tracking backward the events until it was clear that the very moment that pupils took their attention out ahead and began to stand or sit was the exact moment I could see (or feel with my hands) the slightest beginning of the 'misuses'. The moment

before they started to stand, their 'use' was relatively fine. But the moment they 'decided' to go to standing and rushed out ahead of themselves, all these characteristic 'misuses' manifested, seemingly at the same moment.

I wasn't much closer to seeing directly what caused what, until I realized (again) that it was clear at the moment of the beginning of the pattern, that the human beings were deciding to stand and reach out as they thought they had to. The human beings were NOT deciding to pull their heads back.

Suddenly, the possibility of a whole new range of experiments appeared. The people I was working with were now becoming much more conscious of their rushing out ahead and aware of exactly the moment when they started to do it. Thus it occurred to me that rather than have them inhibit the 'pulling back of their heads' which 'they' weren't 'doing' anyway, I'd get them to inhibit the 'getting ahead of themselves', which they actually were doing.

It took a little while to accomplish that, because they were so deeply convinced that they couldn't get up without doing what they normally did, but after a few attempts most people were more or less able to just 'stay with themselves' the whole way. That is, to come to standing being where they were at each moment, feeling whatever they felt, thinking what they thought and allowing themselves to remain aware of their goal but not to rush out beyond their own experience of the moment in any way, nor in any way to try to change anything.

When they more or less managed this they all reported that the movement was so much easier than normal. There was no particular strain or effort and they were so much more aware and 'present' all the way. Many said it was like they weren't really 'doing' anything, even though they did achieve their goal.

I was amazed, because from my point of view, those 'habitual unconscious misuses' had more or less disappeared all by themselves! I had not done any guiding with my hands or verbal 'directions'. The pupil had not released or directed or made any change at all in their 'use'. All I had done was to keep coaching them to stay in the moment with where they were as they allowed themselves to stand and that was the only change they had made from their normal rushing.

When we played with the same process in bending to pick something up, the same thing happened. Just by getting them to refrain from their normal tendency to get out ahead of themselves and narrow to the pen, they went instead into a flowing movement with the most enviable 'monkey' and obviously supported balance. Again they reported much less sense of effort and so much more presentness and wholeness. And no one had been taking care of any of those details at all!

What was happening in front of me in their physical co-ordination and functioning--what I had been used to calling their 'use of the self'--was just happening all by itself when the pupil stopped doing what they had actually been doing.

As a process, it was very easy to help them catch what they were actually doing because they WERE actually doing it. When they could choose not to do that (which meant making a choice against their reinforced belief system), their whole system functioned differently without

anyone having to direct it. And I do mean their whole system. Not just a free neck or a sense of more free hips or better breathing, but a whole person was present.

In fact, most people didn't even report changes in specific parts at all, just that 'they' were more there, feeling more easy and more whole. They didn't become MORE AWARE of their body and their pullings down, they DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A BODY. They were just themselves all the way out into the room around them. This was one of the most distinct differences that people reported, especially those who were used to the experiences from inhibiting pulling their heads back and directing while the teacher guided them in action.

I was beginning to get my answer as to what was more primary...

At this point I'm tempted to go on with another example of what an important difference it makes when we find out what the person is actually up to compared to when we assume that they are unconsciously pulling down. And I will. Later.

But that example shows a quite different aspect of how we work and in any case, came quite a few years after these first discoveries. Therefore, first I'd like to look at the conclusions I drew from these initial experiments and what seemed to be happening in them, because the light it throws on our Alexander belief system, suggests some very different interpretations from the ones Alexander drew. If you are impatient, you can jump ahead to the section titled, "The Violinist" for the other example and come back here later.

When I'd repeated these experiments enough times over a number of months, and when other teachers and trainees around me had also made similar experiments and we'd all seen the same sort of thing happening again and again, it was clear enough what the events were that occurred to hazard a theory of what was going on.

On the face of it, what seemed to be happening was that when people--the actual thinking, feeling, intending, human beings--got out ahead of themselves (for whatever reasons) there took place a set of consistent physical reactions (heads pulling back, legs tightening, etc.) that SIMPLY DID NOT TAKE PLACE if they were not getting ahead of themselves.

When they were not getting ahead of themselves they were operating in a way that I was coming to think of as just BEING PRESENT IN THE MOMENT (because that's how people often described it). Being present in each moment of whatever activity, neither out ahead, nor in any way looking into the physical feelings or parts observing or correcting or inhibiting anything in the body; just accepting whatever state they are in, whether they liked that state or not, simply because that IS where they are at the moment.

Since they were not doing anything at all at these moments except allowing themselves to go into activity as they are and since, when they did that, everything seemed to work quite well, co-ordinated and whole with a definite good use, I found it hard to avoid drawing the conclusion that when someone was just BEING themselves in the PRESENT MOMENT, some inherent integrating function was taking care of everything in a quite satisfactory way. The human beings sure weren't doing it--they weren't

doing anything at all except being themselves! This was as literally NON-DOING as you can get, seems to me.

Furthermore, since the only thing they had changed was to register what they had actually been up to and then choose not to do it, it was also an obvious conclusion that those habitual 'doings' constituted an INTERFERENCE to this integrating function (or primary control or whatever we choose to call it). Sounds kind of Alexander doesn't it? Except here we're not talking about 'unconscious habits' of misuse of the body (necks, backs and legs) interfering with the functioning, but rather people's experienced actions based on their reality construct.

From this new point of view, then, the learning possible and available for any individual, is not that they have unconscious habits of pulling their heads back, etc. which they need to inhibit and preventatively direct, but that they HAVE HAD a whole belief

system, reinforced by their tangible sensory experience (which is why it seems like a 'reality' to the person--they 'feel' it). The precise form that this construct has taken for any particular individual will, of course, depend on their experiences and history.

The further learning for that person is that their 'old reality' was an unreliable or false appreciation of what was happening because when they refrain from rushing out ahead and doing anything to help themselves up, they actually get up more easily. How can they escape for long the conclusion that what they thought was helping them get up, was actually making it harder to get up? That is, that they had been suffering (literally) under a delusion as to the way that the world (gravity, muscles, everything) works and now they were coming to a MORE true (or accurate or reliable) construct or interpretation about reality.

I was coming to see more and more clearly the distinction between what the person was up to and the physical/physiological effects of that doing. And that when someone changed what they were doing, the physical/physiological effects immediately also changed. That is, I was beginning to see that what was happening physically or functionally (heads pulling back, legs tightening, etc.) was simply the organization or coordination of that particular kind of doing that the person was up to.

This is Part 2 of 3

There was a piece of the puzzle missing to me when I had got this far. Why those particular kinds of coordination (or malcoordination if you like) when the person, for instance got out ahead of themselves, and why the change to a much better functioning when they came back to just being as they were in the moment?

I had to play around with these experiments myself so that I was, as much as I could, experiencing that same change before I understood this one. It is easiest to understand what I found by looking at what is happening in sitting down. When I just go 'in the moment' (not getting ahead of myself) I find myself balanced and all parts moving together. I could change direction and walk or stand up again at any time. There is no particular sense of effort and nothing standing out in any one part of me more than any other. It was nice--'nothing' to it.

When I switched to just 'sitting down in the chair' and just 'going into the movement' with my attention out ahead to the chair I was now trying to get to, I had an immediate experience of going off balance backwards and my arms and chest reached out to regain balance--the effect of which was that, relatively speaking, my head came back. This reaching certainly helped with my balance, but I still came with a bump onto the chair. This definitely felt familiar from years ago.

Try it yourself by standing in front of a hard chair and going to sitting by sticking your bum backwards and going for the chair. You'll see (and feel) the immediate reaction as your legs grab and your arms reach a bit forward.

I realized that the same thing was happening when I stood up my 'old' way. I was rushing out ahead to get up off the chair at a moment when I still wasn't over my feet. The pull of my upper body and the grab of my legs was again part of A BALANCE REACTION. The same thing also happened when I went to bend by narrowing my attention out to what I wanted to pick up and reaching out with an arm, my upper torso following forward. My legs had to grab to save me from slamming into the floor. As my legs grabbed, they were unable to go into their inherent monkey-like bending and I had to pull and strain my arm and torso even more to 'reach' the pen.

Looking at things this way was suddenly turning everything up side down. The pulling back of the head and tightening of the legs in sitting had been, in 'Alexander' terms, a 'misuse'-a so-called 'unconstructive and unconscious habit'. Now it could be seen to be NOT ONLY a perfectly normal balance reaction, but, in fact, A VERY GOOD AND ESSENTIAL PROTECTIVE REACTION. Without that response, you'd be in deep trouble as you went off balance and smashed into the chair or the floor. That is your millions-of-years-evolved system saying, "You're the boss. If you want to go out ahead like that, I'll just do my best to cope with it and try to save you." And it's a totally coordinated, whole pattern to boot, perfectly appropriate to the situation and automatically coming into play.

In other words, Alexander's phraseology was more right-on than he probably realized. The USE OF THE SELF was exactly that--what the 'I' was up to, not what my body was up to. What happened in your body was the consequent completely coordinated pattern of FUNCTIONING of that particular USE of the self. Coordinated, that is, in the sense of an entire pattern from top to bottom even though that pattern may be full of contractions and stress points because of what is needed to cope with what you are up to. And for sure, USE AFFECTS FUNCTIONING. Not some time later, but immediately and always. Indeed the 'body pattern' is nothing more or less than the automatic and highly-coordinated functioning of the use of ourselves.

From this construct, it can be seen that there is absolutely nothing 'wrong' with these 'functionings'. They are simply the inevitable and appropriate coordination of what the person is up to. This is obvious when we invite someone to stop doing what they were actually doing (their USE) and the next moment the entire system is in a different coordination--one that is much better, much more whole and much easier. The MISUSE is in what the SELF is doing, not in the coordinated body functioning that arises. And misuse is really an inaccurate term for it. You, the self, are doing what you are doing because, in your reality

construct, that is what makes sense to do. That is, it is mistaken appreciation or inaccurate conception of how the universe works. This can only change by exposing the misconceptions so learning can take place.

This also explains why we don't normally feel our heads pulling back, etc. We're not meant to. All that coordinated functioning is already taken care of 'naturally' by millions of years of evolution so that we don't have to pay attention to it. Indeed, we have no business in there, which is why we're not set up to feel what goes on inside--all we'll end up doing if we try is to interfere. Just because we can see a head pull back we assume we know how it all works and we further assume it's up to us to do something about it.

Well, I can tell you, my assumptions were certainly being blown all apart!

The Violinist

Fast forward quite a number of years to a small group class of about 5 people in London just after I had ended my training school.

A violinist had come for the first time. She wanted help with a painful tension in the forearm of her bowing arm. If I remember correctly (it was well over a year ago), she had been forced to give up playing for a time and had recently gone back to playing some professional concerts of chamber music with 4 or 5 other musicians. She'd begun to have the problem again and was worried that it would get worse and disrupt her chances of playing. She had previously had some Alexander lessons with a teacher near where she lived and that work had made her feel better at the moment and for a while after, but the problem kept coming back. She had come to me because she had heard that I had a different way of working and that maybe I could help her get rid of the problem.

I invited her to notice that she already had a belief system in which she identified the problem with the symptom. The 'it' she wanted to get rid of was the tension and pain. I explained that in my approach we were not going to do anything to change her arm or relieve the tension or learn any procedures that would enable her to get rid of the tension if it returned, but rather we were going to find out what was causing the problem so that she could change the cause and not have the tension at all any more.

And how we were going to find the cause was to look carefully at the situation to gather information to become clear about what was happening--the actual events, her thoughts, feelings, etc. and the sequence of these. If we could see clearly what was happening then maybe we'd see what the actual problem was. Part of the larger situation was that she was here to see what she might be able to do to change. So the first place to look is always to see what she herself may be doing or be up to, the effect of which is (probably among other things) to make her right arm tense and sore. Only afterwards, if this does not change everything, does it make sense to look at what she might need to learn about how to go about changing her arm or her 'posture' (as she put it) or learning better bowing technique, etc.

So I began to ask questions to get more information about what was happening. First I asked her when she noticed the tension and pain? She said that it happened on and off, but that it was almost always when she was playing the violin.

I asked her what happened when she felt these symptoms--how did she respond to this event? She thought a moment and replied that she was usually busy playing, but that she tried to relax her arm because she could feel that she was gripping the bow too tightly and that lately she'd been trying to release her neck too, but that it usually didn't help much.

I pointed out again that it seemed that she felt that what was wrong was the symptom and because of that reality construct (or belief system) it seemed to make perfect sense for her to do something to change her state of tension in order to get rid of the 'problem'.

Then I asked if she knew WHY she had this symptom when she played the violin? She said that she didn't know exactly, but it must be something she was doing wrong in her bowing or her posture or maybe because she was just too tense.

I asked if she knew what the 'something' was that she thought she was doing wrong. After a moment she had to admit that she really didn't know at all, but had been to quite a few teachers (music and otherwise) to see if they knew.

Notice, I told her, that you don't actually know what may be happening to cause the tension, yet you are assuming you can change it by somehow altering the body state to get rid of it. Notice also that this doesn't seem to be working. At the very least you can sometimes (or your teachers can) manage to change the tension state, but then there it is back again the very next time you do...??? What?? Well, the bare fact of the matter is that you DON'T KNOW what you're doing each time...

The most important thing in learning is for anyone to know what they DON'T know, then they'll know what they need to learn. If they don't really realize that they don't yet know what is causing these symptoms, of course they have no option but to try to cope with them. If they are led to think that THE SYMPTOMS ARE the problem, they will not even think to look for the cause, but only the 'solution'.

Since she now knew that she didn't know what the cause is, we turned our attention to how we can find out. So how can she do this? Notice that she always has a 'natural' place to start, which is at the moment of her symptom, the tension. This was the moment in which her wonderful system sent a loud message to her with red lights and sirens saying, "oh oh, wake up, something is wrong! Something is happening that you need to change."

At this point in the learning process, she only had the 'wake-up call' but not the information as to what it was that might need changing. So I asked her if she ALWAYS had the tension and/or pain when she played the violin. And she answered that no, only some of the time. For instance, last week her group was playing a small promotional gig that they were not even being paid for and there was no problem. In fact she played well and it was quite fun to play. But then two days later they played in a bigger hall and there were three critics present so she was hoping it would be the same, but she had the symptoms quite strongly.

The next question was obvious: so if you have the symptoms some of the time while playing and not other times, what is different between the times when you have it and when you don't?

She thought a bit again and then said, well, when I don't really care I don't get it, but as soon as I start to care how well I play, there it is. (I'll bet this sounds familiar to any musicians out there on the alextech forum, eh?)

I pointed out to her that she had had available to her a lot of information: she had recognized the symptoms, she knew when she had the symptoms and when she didn't, she even knew the kind of situations where one happened versus the kind of situation where the other happened. What she hadn't thought to do was to compare them for the difference. One simple question from me and there it was.

It is important to help people recognize when they have information from their own experience that was ALREADY THERE and available to them. It is also important to affirm for them that their wonderful information gathering systems are working very well. It is the construct placed on that information that hides its meaning for them. They have been HAVING THE EXPERIENCE, BUT MISSING THE MEANING. That is, they can 'have the experience' until the cows come home and not be able to help themselves one little bit if they fail to understand what it is AN EXPERIENCE OF.

So there we were with this clue that after she started to 'care', she started to experience the tension. What's important at this stage is to distinguish very clearly between the things that are happening 'to me' and the things that 'I am doing'. Remember our young man above--the head pulling back was happening to him; he was not doing it. But he was doing the rushing out to get up. When he stopped doing that, the head pulling back did not happen.

For our violinist, the tension was happening to her. She didn't say to herself, "now I'll tense my arm and make it hurt." It just happened--she didn't even want it. It was important for her to realize that the 'starting to care' was also happening to her. She didn't say, "hmm, now I'll start to care here. Yes, there it is, now I've got it. I'm starting to care." She just found herself caring more at some times than at others. This is clear if we look at it the other way around. If she mistook her caring for the problem and tried to change it, just how would she do that? Can you decide not to care? If you try it, does it really work?

Thus, we were still one step away. We had not quite found what she was doing, but we were very close. I asked her if she did anything differently in those situations where she started to care? She replied that, for instance when the critics were in the audience, she wanted to play wonderfully. And she got quite nervous before the performance that she wouldn't be able to play as well as she wanted. So she tried to play really well. Whereas, when she didn't care, she didn't do anything 'special'.

There we had it: 'she tried to play really well'. In her belief system, of course (and many other peoples' as well) it made perfect sense for her to try to 'improve' her playing when it was important. And because it made perfect sense she went ahead and did it, every time...

I asked her whether, in those situations when she cared and tried to play better, she actually did manage to play better? She said, "No, not at all! Worse. I play better when I don't care." Even though she had just said the words, she obviously was not taking in the significance of her experiences or she would have seen that these direct

experiences over and over were not at all matching her belief system. But in the beginning stages of being liberated from delusion (if I may put it that way), the ideas of the belief system are far more 'real' than the actual real life experiences. And someone will hang onto those ideas or ideals even in the face of constantly contradictory experiences. As long as they are hanging on, their constructing nature simply 'construes' these experiences in another way that fits the belief or filters them out. More on this later.

At any rate, having found something that, as near as she could tell, she was 'doing'--trying to play better--we were now in the position to make an experiment. What if she could meet that moment and not do what she usually did? Fortunately, I had made sure that she brought her violin and we had a group there who could be her audience of critics. We set up the experiment so that she could play one of the pieces she wanted to play well. It was realistic enough for her because she was already nervous about playing well and what the others would think.

I told her that she could not fail at this experiment, because the goal here was not to play well, but to see if it was possible to meet that situation in which she would normally react to her caring by trying to play better and instead to not do anything at all to play better. To just play however she plays and no better. In other words, to go about it the same way she does when she doesn't care, even though she may be feeling very different. The worst that can happen is that it won't come out the way she wants.

She started to play and I let her go on for about a minute or two, long enough for the experiment. The first question is always, "how well did you manage the experiment?" There is, after all, no point in looking at the results of an experiment that we haven't even succeeded in making.

She said she had not managed it very well. She'd been doing OK for a while, then when it didn't sound the way she wanted, she started to try to play better and she could feel the tension already in her arm. That's good, I told her, that you see that as soon as you start trying, you get the symptom. That symptom is what it feels like to try to be better than you are. What an idea, eh? To try to be better than you are! Just think of it.

It's also good that you could notice exactly when you started trying. Right there in the moment, I asked her, precisely what sort of trying you were doing?

She reflected back for a moment and then said that she had focused on those notes to get them right. A few more questions revealed that she started to narrow her focus to the notes AFTER some notes had been 'wrong' and that by 'focusing' on the notes she meant taking her attention specially to the area where the bow touched the strings--where she thought 'the notes' came from.

We now had more precise information about the exact nature of what she was doing. And, more importantly, her doing had now been a tangible experience for her. Of course, it was before too, after all, SHE had been doing it. She just had never quite 'realized' that was what she started to do, even though she had been there experiencing it. Perhaps, more to the point, she had not had a construct where this was potentially important information about what she might want to stop doing. She

had a construct where this was precisely what she HAD to do to play better.

So, we went into the experiment again, choosing to not do anything to play better no matter how she felt or how it sounded and this time with the extra clarity that if any notes 'went wrong', that was NOT a stimulus to focus to make them right. Rather, any notes 'going wrong' could be a reminder to just register that they were not the notes she wanted and carry on without doing anything to 'correct' them.

She played again and after a while I asked how well she had managed the experiment and she said she'd managed much better, but there were still some times when she had focused on trying to play well. I reminded her that this was only the second experiment and already she was improving in her ability to carry it out. Again she had noticed when she had reacted by trying the tension was there. We were still not looking at any results, since she was still learning how to make the experiment.

After another reminder of what the experiment was, we went into it a third time. This time she said that she had more or less managed to just let happen what happened without reacting with her focused trying. These three experiments had taken about 15 minutes to explain and carry out.

This is Part 3 of 3

Now, since she had more or less managed the experiment, was the time to look at the results. I asked her what had happened? It was easy, she said.

I asked her if she knew why it was easy? She looked puzzled for a moment then said with a smile, it was because she hadn't done anything. Just like the times you don't care, I added.

Then she added that she'd played really well. Just like the times you didn't care, I added. But it was important that she really take in that she didn't 'do' the 'playing really well'. It just happened. She did the choosing not to try to do what she usually did to help out. That's why it 'just' happened.

Interestingly, by the last experiment, she didn't care any more. But that also, just happened. It was easy.

Notice I said to her, that so far she had spoken mostly of the 'musical' results. How did she feel in that last experiment? What about this tension thing?

The tension had completely disappeared! It was there when she first played and a little when she played the second time, but now it was gone. So gone, she hadn't even noticed its absence until I asked her. I asked her to play in her old way again, focusing on the notes to get them right. After a minute or so, the tension was right back there again. When she gave up trying to control the notes at all and 'just played', it was gone again.

She was very surprised. She said she had expected me to work with her arm to help her release the tension and with her body like others had. I replied that, what we just did, what she just experienced, was that when she stopped reacting in her old way by trying to control her playing, the tension went. How could we see the tension as anything other than the functional organization of her trying? That is, the tension is part of the entire 'coordination' that her

system organizes to carry out her trying to control her playing. Remember. she's the boss.

Or to put it slightly differently, what she was doing was the 'trying to control'. The tension was the experience of that kind of trying to control. No more, no less. It has NOTHING to do with her arm, except that her arm is where she happens to feel that part of the entire coordination. It DOES HAVE TO DO WITH her belief system and how she was 'forced' down a certain pathway of action because in that belief system 'controlling' is the only thing that makes sense to do.

Now, however, she is in a very different place. Now she has quite consciously seen how she normally reacts to certain events (the critics hence the wrong notes) which she interprets in certain ways (they won't like her unless she is even better than she is) and therefore is forced to react by doing something ('trying to control'--as if that made sense to do and as if a human being could actually do it).

She has also actually made the experiment of quite consciously meeting those moments and choosing not to react that way. It took her a few times to learn to do that, but only 3 times over 15 minutes.

And, from that experiment, she has quite consciously registered that some very surprising things happened (and didn't happen) when she did choose differently. Her surprise shows that she was not at all expecting those results. In fact she was convinced, as are most people, that if they don't do their controlling 'techniques' it will be really, really bad.

With all these conscious experiences and an understanding of WHAT THEY ARE EXPERIENCES OF, how could her belief system stay intact?

She just perceived how the 'controlling' was NOT actually making her play better. When she stopped it, she played better. This contradicts her belief system.

And she saw that the 'playing better' happened BY ITSELF. She didn't have to do it. This contradicts her belief system.

And if she didn't DO anything to play better, how can we interpret it but that this is how well she ACTUALLY PLAYS, since it is what is happening when she is not doing anything. She certainly DIDN'T KNOW that she plays this well. And how could she when she had constant experiences of playing poorly because she was trying to play better?

Her attempts to control 'to play better' can now be seen for what they are--interferences that bring down her playing. This is also different than her belief system.

And the tension was simply the feeling of her trying to control; of narrowing her attention in order to try to take over her ALREADY EXISTING COORDINATION. She didn't know this before but she knows it now because every time she stops the trying it goes away and every time she starts trying again, it's back. After all, what is tension, but the feeling of us working against ourselves?

She also experienced in the most powerful way that the process she just used was SO DIFFERENT from what she normally does and FELT SO ABSOLUTELY AGAINST HER HABIT that she would probably never ever have thought to use it. This also gives a very good measure of

the familiarity and strength of her normal construct--roughly equal to the amount of 'force' she has to meet and the amount of courage she needs to make that choice.

But 'just' the experiences that 'go against' her construct are not enough. She must understand them for what they are. So I went to great trouble to re-iterate for her what she was registering and to put these experiences of hers in conjunction with the belief system as she has revealed it, so that the contradictions sit there like a large elephant in the teaching room and can't be kept separate.

I pointed out that she must not accept these obvious interpretation as fact at this point. ONE TIME PROVES NOTHING. But, if she goes home and keeps making the same experiment each time in the next few weeks that she notices her symptom wake-up call, she WILL SEE if a similar thing happens. If so, then maybe she can believe it. In these first experiences, we can only make a tentative hypothesis, SUBJECT TO FURTHER PROOF. Or at least it is tentative for the pupil for whom this is the first time and brand new. I have seen it hundreds of times with as many pupils in the last several years so 'working principle' is a better term for where I am. Or perhaps 'new construct' would do as well.

Notice that all this happens without any need to assume 'unconscious habits' of pulling back the head' or 'stiffening her arm'. Nor any need for consequent 'directing' of necks to be free, or releasing arms either. In fact, no need for any teacher's hands on at all, since we are simply working with the pupil's own existing awareness and perception AND their existing ability to choose once their actions are perceived.

There is not only no need for the teacher to 'give' the pupil a new experience, it would be positively counter-productive since, from this point of view, the pupil is already having lots of their own experiences all the time. They are simply misinterpreting these experiences. They just didn't know that to go about things the way they are going about them inevitably brings about the particular symptoms they were experiencing. Through that lack of knowledge they doomed to repeat those experiences. They had a faulty construct or 'reality appreciation' as I put it, and therefore, quite 'naturally' were acting in the way that made sense to them from the point of view of that construct or belief system.

A word about our constructs might go well here (or maybe a few hundred words).

As human beings we are construct-creating creatures. Perhaps other creatures have this also, but we certainly do in a big way. It is our nature to always take in the raw flux of experience and interpret it. This is not under your conscious control. This 'constructing' takes place deep in your system long before 'you', the conscious human being, are presented with the fully-constructed results as 'reality'. In fact, 'you' the conscious human being are part of this construct, since the construct IS your consciousness. Your existing belief systems provide the filters for the raw data so that only some sensations fit within your construct and so are deemed important and hence are 'experienced'. These 'experiencings' in turn reinforce the construct until, for most people, the construct becomes ever more deeply fixed and 'certain'.

But an example that most of us have experienced will make aspects of this construct-creation clear. Have you

ever been in a train waiting in a station with another train waiting on the track right outside your window? Then your train moves off until a few seconds later, you realize that it wasn't you moving, it was the train beside you?

Notice the sudden start when you 'realize' you're not moving. Your wonderful millions-of-years-evolved construct-creating system took in the visual motion outside the window and sent you a 'reality' that you were moving. It wasn't an idea, it was a lived experience of REALLY MOVING. That's why there's the sudden surprise, the almost physical jolt when your 'reality' changes. We are visually dominant creatures, remember, which is why this construct can be so dominant even when there are none of the usual kinaesthetic sensations supporting movement. The physical 'jolt' is the returning to the kinaesthetic experience of 'yourself' which had been filtered out as not matching the moving construct.

You can understand why this is the first 'reality' you are presented with if you remember that this construct system evolved way back when we lived mostly 'in nature' not in our own self-created environments. In nature, when the visual background is moving, it is because you are moving relative to it. It is not often in nature that you are standing still and the whole world is moving!. Quite possibly your anticipation of the train starting to move plays a part in determining the construct also.

Another aspect of this 'illusion' that is worth noting is that the you-are-moving construct carries on until some sensory data so blatantly contradicts it that your system is forced to re-interpret. Usually it is something like the other train pulls past you and you see that you are left standing still in the station. Or you notice the unmoving station through the windows of the other train.

Your construct-creating system is not there to trick you, of course, but to give you the best interpretation it can come up with. When the data can't be made to fit, your system goes, "Oops, sorry about that interpretation, here, try this one." YOU don't have to figure out what is happening and come up with a better interpretation, you just get the NEW IMPROVED reality dumped unceremoniously into your 'experience'.

The same process is at work in these lessons. As we bring out the belief system in people's words and actions and show them how their construct channels them into taking certain actions, then make the experiments of not going down that pathway, of course, such different experiences come up that blatantly contradict the old 'reality'. They don't have to intellectually 'understand' what is happening, though it helps. They just have to 'be present' for the contradiction. This 'violation' of the 'reality' of the construct shows it for what it is--merely a construct, and a faulty one at that. No self-respecting reality can stand up to that demotion and sooner or later will collapse under its own weight.

Fortunately for us, just like in the train, we don't need to come up with a new and more accurate construct. Your system has millions of years of experience at that and will happily manufacture another one in short order. And it will be intrinsically MORE ACCURATE than the last because it has to take all these new facts and contradictions into account.

Most people, of course, with a lifetime of existing under one major reality, will seize upon a new one as if this time

it really is reality and attempt to fix it into certainty. It takes several times through the cycle and several changes of reality to see that we will be trading in our old, less accurate and less workable realities for new, more accurate and more workable ones as long as they are relatively inaccurate to the ultimate 'objective' reality, whatever that is. Another word for this is LEARNING.

I could go on and on, as I guess you gathered, but that will have to wait for the book.

Speaking of books, when I was thinking about this a while back I suddenly thought, what if Alexander had just made one more connection when he was making his 'evolution of the technique' experiments? He was so close yet so far.

When he realized that he was pulling his head back, lifting his chest and depressing his larynx, what if he hadn't been so quick to assume that HE was doing it?

When he saw that it wasn't just his head, neck and back, but an entire pattern of his whole system, what if he had asked, "pattern of what?"

When he noticed that the same pattern was happening in his normal speaking in daily life but much less exaggerated, what if he had gone on to ask, "what am I doing differently in performing than in daily life?"

Who knows what he might have found, but like many performers I've worked with, he might have found that he had a construct that says performing took some extra preparation on his part, like the gripping of the stage with his feet that he had already noticed.

Perhaps in those days of large unamplified halls, he may have found that his respiratory problems instilled in him the sense that he needed to try a little more to project his voice out to the whole theatre.

This is pure speculation, of course, and it doesn't matter what he might have found, but if he had found something like this, what if he had then made the experiment of not doing the extra bit he thought he had to do?

What if he then found that his whole coordination changed and the head pulling back, chest raising, etc. was no longer happening?

And what if a colleague out in the hall said that not only was his voice filling the hall nicely, but that the quality was much, much better, mate?

This is exactly the sort of thing which happens to the performers I work with all the time.

Everything would have been very different if Alexander had made that connection. But he didn't and the Alexander work has become largely defined by its hands-on work whereby teachers facilitate changed psycho-physical experiences for the pupil, and by the principle of inhibiting unconscious physical/functional habits and preventatively directing in order to allow the optimal 'psychophysical functioning'.

Of course, I don't expect all these words to necessarily convince anyone. Words cannot do that. You'd need to come and see for yourself again and again what happens. Or better still, open your eyes from this new point of view in your work and see what happens when you find out what the person IS actually up to...

I would like to end with a thought about "standing on the shoulders of giants" as Newton said. I can't see that I

would have been in a position to make the discoveries I have if I had not had the benefit of the discoveries Alexander did make and the teachers who taught me.

Anyone who has experienced the benefits they gained from study of the Technique knows that they are better off after than before. They also know some of the knots and difficulties they (and their pupils if they are teachers) can get into trying to make sense of the work. Maybe these are not just THEIR difficulties. Maybe there are some conceptions in the work that could benefit from another point of view.

However, I wish to repeat, that the question for me is NOT what is wrong with the Technique. The real question is how much further can we go when we can see things even more clearly?

Postscript: Where this has taken me...

Needless to say, my discoveries and experiences have moved me to very different understanding and consequently to a very different practice. Initially, of course, when I was running the training course to train Alexander teachers in London, I was seeing these insights as deepening my Alexander understanding. Then, as they began to move into new territory, I saw it as new developments of the Alexander work, stretching it to new possibilities. This was something that to me had always seemed to what the work was about-learning, growth and development.

The reactions of some of my colleagues showed me that many people did not want the work to change beyond its recognizable (to them) 'traditions'.

So, after much consideration of whether it made sense, in spite of them, to keep trying to shoehorn this new work into a stretched definition of the Alexander work, or posit a 'new' Alexander work that is evolving, it is becoming more and more apparent that this really is a radically different work. At the very least, people familiar with the Alexander Technique would be surprised by this new work (and often are), and anyone knowing this new work, would not be expecting what they would likely get from an Alexander teacher. This is an important factor.

Thus, I do not call myself an Alexander teacher any longer and do not teach the Alexander Technique any more. It makes no sense for me to do so knowing what I now know.

For the moment I have named this new work, LearningMethods and there are some 5 other teachers teaching it with me. They are, or were, all Alexander teachers. Most of them either trained with, or worked with me in the Centre for Training, my Alexander teacher training course in London. All have then carried on with me as the work really developed and have been consistently part of that learning and development.

There are a growing number of other Alexander teachers who are coming to workshops and studying when they can, then going back to their practices and trying out these new ideas. It's a big change to make for someone trained in another way.

There are also a number of people who are learning to become teachers with me. Three of these were part way through their Alexander training with Ann Penistan and myself when the training ended and have elected to carry on in this new work. They are very nearly ready to go off on

their own as new teachers of the work. Others have just begun and this work will be their experience of learning to help others learn.

There is no formal or full-time training. Instead they are learning in what amounts to an on-going apprenticeship situation. That is, they attend most of the workshops I give and, along with their own on-going learning for themselves, begin to practice working with others as they see how people learn. It is not a formal training in the sense that there is no structure of separate classes for those training. The people learning to become teachers are learning in the 'real life' situation of the workshops where 'real life' people (if I may call them that) bring their real-life problems and go through their realizations and changes.

There is no time frame to their 'training' (that is, it is not a '3-year training'). People who are interested just keep coming and keep learning, extending their learning more and more toward helping others until they have learned enough to manage that competently. This might take longer for some than for others depending on how often they can attend and where they are in their own understanding and practice when they start.. Certainly makes it hard for anyone to end-gain for the certificate (there isn't one). And it automatically selects those who really are dedicated enough to keep coming on their own steam. We'll see how it all works out.

Anyone interested in more information about the work or in details of workshops, etc. can contact me directly or visit the web site at: <http://www.learningmethods.com>.

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Date: Fri, 26 Jun 1998
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
To: alextech@compuserve.com,
alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: On Belief Systems and Learning, part 3 of 3
Hello list: (and David)

I am reading your 3 part post with a sort of horrified fascination. I cannot imagine how you spent so many years in and around the technique without thinking these things through before, discussing them with other teachers, or reading about them in FM's books.

I understand your pupil's eagerness to disown pulling his head back. Inappropriate reactions to stimuli are perpetuated BECAUSE they occur outside of our field of awareness. They are not 'our fault.' Nevertheless they are not 'done' by any agency outside ourselves. If misusing ourselves was caused by some personal perversity or conscious decision, all we would have to do is tell people to stop. The ego-bruising and self scolding that interfere with learning the technique are themselves examples of how incorrect conceptions limit our ability to adapt. e.g. If we assume that all our actions are brought about by our conscious choice, how could we have 'done' the misuse if we didn't decide to do it? We have to get past this fallacy to become teachable.

Pulling your head back is not the problem, end-gaining is. Your (re)discovery that remaining in touch with the 'means whereby' fills the gap in consciousness where habitual misuse occurs is a terrific point. If we are actually present in our actions we will not do things to ourselves which we don't like.

Alexander points out several times that 'directing' is nothing that we are not already doing in real life. Learning and teaching how to direct ourselves consciously, IN ACTION, is an enormous task; 'conditioning' a student by having them repeat the verbal orders (or for that matter, by whisking them in and out of the chair a few hundred times) is only of use insofar as the process TEACHES the student how to direct themselves in real life.

A few quotes and comments:

"reality construct or belief system"

is a synonym for what FM called conception.

"Another aspect of this 'illusion' that is worth noting is that the you-are-moving construct carries on until some sensory data so blatantly contradicts it that your system is forced to re-interpret."

Of Course, this is what 'giving new sensory experiences' is for!

"what if Alexander had just made one more connection when he was making his 'evolution of the technique' experiments? He was so close yet so far. When he realized that he was pulling his head back, lifting his chest and depressing his larynx, what if he hadn't been so quick to assume that HE was doing it? When he saw that it wasn't just his head, neck and back, but an entire pattern of >his whole system, what if he had asked, "pattern of what?" When he noticed that the same pattern was happening in his normal speaking in daily life but much less exaggerated, what if he had gone on to ask, "what am I doing differently in performing than in daily life?"

Please read Use of the Self. Searching for the differences between his reaction to the stimulus to speak in ordinary situations versus his reaction to the stimulus to 'recite' was one of the earliest experiments Alexander performed! At the end of his experiments (at least as he reported them) the last hurdles involved:

1. Finding a way to know for certain if he was really not reverting to his old misuse.
2. Observing and contrasting his responses to different stimuli (including the stimulus to recite) many times over until the practice of retaining his awareness of himself in action could be sustained in the face of any stimulus.

John Coffin

Date: Fri, 26 Jun 1998
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: fhooper@postoffice.ptd.net (Fred Hooper)
Subject: Gorman's essay

Hi, all, and thanks to David Gorman for sharing his insights in detail:

I hesitate to be a reductionist because I know I may miss certain subtleties, but there are a few core points that I would underscore.

- 1) According to Chris Stevens, and I suppose a bevy of researchers, the number one priority of the neuromuscular

system is to prevent falling. So the tightening or stiffening at precarious states of balance is as natural as free movement. I wouldn't want to lose this any more than I would want to lose the flight-or-fight response. What I do want to do is reserve it for those moments when it is necessary to save face, both literally and figuratively. Often when I introduce AT to pianists, I refer to it as "The Art of Not Falling On Your Face" for this reason. Pianists are often so in danger of falling due to odd approaches to the instrument that they must incorporate stiffness or land on the keys or the floor. The complication occurs when sophisticated movements have to occur in a stiffened condition. (This is one of the monitors I use to determine whether I have gone beyond stability and into stiffness.)

2) Fear is not the enemy either, but conjuring it in inappropriate levels or situations is certainly a difficulty. The natural systems that kick in adrenalin and heighten awareness during danger have literally saved my life. But experiencing high levels of fear on stage has also resulted in some very miserable playing on my part. This is when fear is restrictive because the "predator" - the performance - cannot be clubbed or run from (although I've seen the latter once or twice) so that the adrenalin is used to its best advantage.

Playing right notes is really OK, in my book, unless the performer is afraid that some dire result will come from something less than perfection. For those students, I ask them to play all wrong notes. It can be fascinating to hear how few wrong notes actually get played when they have the permission to play mistakes.

3) When I am working at my best, I do have the feeling of stopping time. I know I am not alone in this, but this is a challenge for musicians. For example, we are often taught to "read ahead", which is a notion I have been challenging lately. And the beat of a conductor or metronome may not allow us the flexibility we desire.

4) The holistic approach of AT allows us the opportunity to problem solve in many ways. Nothing is "just" physical or "just" emotional or "just" rational or "just" spiritual. If this is "true", even a non-hands on approach can have some physical response. (I suggest the book "Mind Over Back Pain", by Dr. John Sarno.

Whether or not it fits with one's teaching style may be another issue.

Be well,

Kay S. Hooper

Date: Sat, 27 Jun 1998 08:39:32 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: Re: On Belief Systems and Learning

Hello John (& all)

John Coffin wrote:

"reality construct or belief system" is a synonym for what FM called conception."

This would be a really good way to describe it, and it is also one of several possibilities. Perhaps we never can be really sure, because the concept of "reality construct" or "belief system" wasn't known at FM's time.

However, I'd like to propose an alternative which I think is equally likely to be true.

For seeing the point I'm trying to make here, you might refer to my earlier mail (June, 21). I put the quote in here again that I then used from CCC:

"... if ... all so-called mental processes are mainly the result of sensory experiences ..., it will be obvious that in our conception of how to employ the different parts of the mechanism in the acts of everyday life WE ARE INFLUENCED CHIEFLY BY SENSORY PROCESSES (feeling). ... in every case, the nature of our response, WHETHER IT BE AN ACTUAL MOVEMENT, AN EMOTION OR AN OPINION, will depend upon the associated activity of the processes concerned with conception and with the sensory and other mechanisms responsible for the "feeling" which we experience. This associated activity is referred to throughout my work as SENSORY APPRECIATION." (CCC 1946 p.20, emphases and quotation marks are Alexander's)

Now, what if the phrase "and other mechanisms" in the above definition, which, together with the sensory mechanisms, are responsible for the "feeling" which we experience, was FM's way to describe what we now would call "belief system"? And could it be that the term "conception" contains more of what we could call a general idea (and sometimes belief, but not a whole belief system) which underlies our specific ideas?

In this way "belief system" would go into and be part of "sensory appreciation". Just look at the following passages, think about my proposal, and try to see it one way or the other:

"Owing to the limited range of the working of his reasoning processes, he must have concluded that his general shortcomings were due to specific muscular shortcomings, and this narrow and erroneous conception led directly to the idea of muscle development by means of specific exercises to be performed at specific times for the purpose of developing specific muscles." (CCC 1946 p.36)

"The significance, however, of the fact that a person's attempt to make practical use of a new idea is conditioned by his conception of the written or spoken word cannot be fully realized until we connect it with the further fact, that this conception, in its turn, is conditioned by the standard of the psycho-physical functioning of the individual, this standard again being influenced by the standard of sensory appreciation; in other words, that the accuracy or otherwise of the individual conception depends upon the standard of psycho-physical functioning and of sensory appreciation present." (CCC 1946 p.65)

"... a teacher, in dealing with the shortcomings of a particular case, must give due consideration to the pupil's fixed conceptions, otherwise these will greatly complicate the problem for both teacher and pupil. Certain of these fixed ideas are encountered in the case of almost every pupil; fixed ideas, for example, as to what constitutes the right and what the wrong method of going to work as a pupil; fixed ideas in regard to the necessity for concentration, if success is to attend the efforts of pupil and teacher; also a fixed belief (based on subconscious guidance) that, if a pupil is corrected for a defect, he should be taught to do something in order to correct it, instead of being taught, as a first principle, how to prevent

(inhibition) the wrong thing from being done." (CCC 1946 p.79f)

"... I have no hesitation in stating that the pupil's fixed ideas and conceptions are the cause of the major part of his difficulties." (CCC 1946 p.80)

"... conceptions which are mainly influenced by unreliable sensory appreciation, acting and reacting subconsciously and harmfully on the processes involved, are incorrect conceptions, and that in these cases unreliable sensory appreciation goes hand in hand with incorrect and deceptive experiences in the psycho-physical functioning." (CCC 1946 p.91f)

"... once consent has been given to react to the stimulus to perform a certain act, they will perform that act, as we say, "instinctively", that is, without any reasoned conception of what direction of the use of the mechanisms is required for its satisfactory performance." (UoS 1946 p.29)

What do you think?

Peter Ruhrberg

Date: Sat, 27 Jun 1998 19:28:40 +0100

To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu

From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>

Subject: Re: On Belief Systems and Learning

Hello all,

I must admit, when I first received David Gorman's thoughts on Belief Systems and Learning I inwardly groaned at the length of it. However, I found it to be exceedingly well written and illustrated with examples. I read it from beginning to end without once thinking about all the things that need doing in the garden. I'd like to thank David for taking the time and effort to share his ideas with us in such a complete way.

However, well-written doesn't necessarily mean well thought-through, and I would like to raise the issues that I find problematic in his LearningMethods.

Let us start with the violinist example. David describes how "trying to play really well" was associated with the arm problems that she complained of. And, when she was finally able to change this "belief system", and to play without caring, her performance was musically better and pain free. This is a great description of how "trying" is usually associated with an increase in muscular effort and a deterioration of the quality of the psycho-physical performance. As such it is a valuable illustration of a principle that Alexander goes on about at great length. I would disagree with David however that it represents a new discovery.

Secondly, although she has been helped to some extent by learning to stop trying to be right, I am concerned that our violinist has missed out on the opportunity to really deal with her problems. I would suggest that she is still left with the same patterns of misuse as before, but as she is not trying so hard, they are just less exaggerated. Such was the case with Alexander who, as David points out, "noticed that the same pattern was happening in his normal speaking in daily life but much less exaggerated".

I would agree fully with David that the way we think has a huge effect on our use and functioning. But once again

this is not a new idea. Alexander talks at length about conception and how the teacher needs to deal with faulty conceptions. As such it is (or ought to be) a part of every Alexander teacher's understanding and practice. But, if all our violinist has received is a new "belief system", that is, the idea that she ought not to care, or to try to be right, I would be very concerned for her long term future. I cannot imagine that the long term effects of that particular "belief system" as it becomes fixed will be positive. Are we really to believe that her psycho-physical health and her career as a violinist will be enhanced over the long term because she is developing the habit of "not caring", without attending to the (now more subtly expressed) misuse from which her problems stem?

Caring, or wanting to be right are mainsprings of human energy and creativity, and are vital for our success and even our survival. We ought not to be teaching people to give these up. Rather instead of "trying" as most people understand it (more muscular tension) we need to help people to gain the ends they so desire through the reasoned means which are the Alexander Technique. Our violinist should continue to want to play well, but she should be taught how to co-ordinate herself to achieve it. Does anyone really think that she will come to great success by not wanting to play well?

I have similar misgivings about David's interpretations concerning the young man rising from the chair. Once again, it is an admirable description of end-gaining, as the end was the entire focus of attention for the young man. In fact this is one of the best descriptions I have read of end-gaining. It comes as no surprise that the young man was able to rise from the chair with much less malco-ordination when he gave up his end and directed his thoughts to what he was doing moment by moment -- classic Alexander. But, like the violinist I would suggest that he has only succeeded in reducing the exaggeration of his misuse without fundamentally changing it. And, what the long term effects of this new "belief system" will be on one whose pattern of misuse is unchanged remains to be seen.

In effect then, LearningMethods appears to have taken some of the principles of the technique and it will likely have some of the success, if only in the short term. Without a demonstration I cannot believe that good use will just "do itself" so long as you have the right "belief system". I think it likely that David has misinterpreted the results of his experiments and is under-emphasising the misuse that remains in his students.

I would like to thank David however for his integrity. For sure his method is not the Alexander Technique and he has shown the courage to give it a new name and to set off on his own.

David Langstroth, david@alexandertec.u-net.com, Cardiff, Wales

Date: Sat, 27 Jun 1998

From: JohnC10303@aol.com

To: pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de, alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

Subject: Re: On Belief Systems and Learning

Hello list: and Peter

Wonderful quotes! You are certainly much better at quickly pulling out relevant examples than I am.

I don't think that terms like "reality construct" and "belief system" are much better than 'concept(ion).' This piece of Alexander jargon is not too esoteric to be useful in day to day practice, and links very well to the concept (construct? belief system?) of sensory appreciation. I can't pull the exact wording from my head, but it goes something like this: Wrong experience encourages the formation of incorrect conceptions, incorrect conceptions are expressed in mis-directed activities, mis-directed activity results in wrong experience.

I am leary of pulling terms like "reality construct" and "belief system" from popular culture. Their very familiarity tends to connect them to concerns outside the realm of the Technique (in particular the way they are used by brain dead cultural relativists).

Thank you all

John Coffin

Date: Sat, 27 Jun 1998

To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu

From: nina@inch.com (Nina Aledort)

Subject: Re: On Belief Systems and Learning

Hello John:

I have to say that this type of language (brain dead cultural relativists) offends me, is uncalled for, and shows a lack of respect for others. It may not be to your use, or liking, but casting aspersions on belief systems or philosophies of others certainly makes me wary of engaging you in dialogue, lest I be cast aside with such dismissal.

Cultural relativism may not work in all situations, but it is an ethical imperative in fields like social work, anthropology, etc.

Unless of course you believe that dominant culture is the same as "truth".

I would have thought that conscious use of self applied to language as well.

Nina Aledort, C.T.A.T., M.S.W.

Date: Sun, 28 Jun 1998

From: JohnC10303@aol.com

To: nina@inch.com, alextech@life.uiuc.edu

Subject: Re: brain dead cultural relativists

Hello list: and Nina

Cultural relativists argue that genital mutilation and infanticide of girls are acceptable behaviours because they are 'part of the cultures' that practice them. Racism, slavery, violence, religious bigotry, all are validated in the same circular fashion.

If you dare to be so 'judgmental' as to suggest that the invasion of Poland in 1939, or for that matter the extermination of the Jewish population of Europe might represent 'inappropriate' (e.g. wrong) behaviour; you risk being asked in shocked tones what right you have to such an opinion, apparently only Nazis have the 'cultural perspective' to judge Nazi behaviour.

These examples may represent the extreme, but they are valid. Try taking a 'relativist' stance on Rev. Fred Phelps,

Pat Robertson or Jesse Helms. Each of them fairly represents the ethical, moral, and cultural standards of their own groups. Those ethical, moral, and cultural standards are wrong, they are harmful. These men do not profess some 'separate but equal' standard of 'truth,' they represent a basis of evil and immorality which SHOULD be recognizable to anyone from any cultural background.

Some quotes and comments:

"Cultural relativism may not work in all situations, but it is an ethical imperative in fields like social work, anthropology, etc."

Cultural relativism is a means of avoiding ethical decision making. Cultural RESPECT is imperative in social work, anthropology. etc.

"Unless of course you believe that dominant culture is the same as "truth"

Cultural relativists believe that (each separate) dominant culture is the same as truth, or that the concept of truth must be abandoned to avoid judgmentalism.

In love and service

John Coffin

Date: Sat, 27 Jun 1998

From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>

To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

Subject: Re: On Belief Systems and Learning

Dear John,

thank you for your email! You see, I also believed that Alexander describes somewhere in his writings the circular-like phenomenon which you pointed out:

"I can't pull the exact wording from my head, but it goes something like this:

[1] Wrong experience encourages the formation of incorrect conceptions,

[2] incorrect conceptions are expressed in mis-directed activities, mis-directed activity results in wrong experience."

But what I could find in FM's writings was merely about the second part of what you described above. I fail to find the whole picture you draw. Just work your way through the following few representative passages, if you will. Of course, there are much more examples, but the ones I found are all very similar to those below.

"The technique ... in which we are interested has been developed throughout from the premiss that, if something is wrong with us, it is because we have been guided by unreliable sensory appreciation leading to incorrect sensory experiences and resulting in misdirected activities. These misdirected activities manifest themselves in the use of the psycho-physical mechanism in connexion with all the general activities of life, and in many varying ways, according to our individual idiosyncrasies. They are influenced by and associated with our incorrect conceptions, our imperfect sensory appreciation, our unduly excited fear reflexes and uncontrolled emotions and prejudices, and our imperfectly adjusted mechanisms. These psycho-physical derangements in the process of formation are the forerunners of a psycho-physical attitude towards the conduct of life in general which must be

considered perverted, and because these misdirected activities are so closely connected with this perverted attitude, they present a problem of great difficulty to both teacher and pupil in any endeavour to convey or acquire knowledge, particularly in regard to the satisfactory use of the psycho-physical mechanisms." (CCC 1946, p.77f)

In the next three examples FM puts it somewhat differently:

"The idea ... of ceasing to do the wrong thing (as a preliminary measure in re-education) makes little or no appeal at first to the average pupil, who, in most cases, goes on trying to "be right" in spite of his experience and of all that his teacher may say. There are many reasons for this, chief among them being, in my opinion, the fact ... that in our conception of how to employ the different parts of our mechanisms, we are guided almost entirely by a sense of feeling which is more or less unreliable. We get into the habit of performing a certain act in a certain way, and we experience a certain feeling in connexion with it which we recognize as "right." THE ACT AND THE PARTICULAR FEELING ASSOCIATED WITH IT BECOMES ONE IN OUR RECOGNITION." (CCC 1946, p.82)

"I will now take an equally fixed and unreasoning conception which is common to most pupils who need re-education and co-ordination - - namely, their fixed ideas AS TO WHAT THEY CAN AND CANNOT DO. Their judgment on these points, of course, can only be based on their previous misleading experiences ..." (CCC 1946, p.85)

"... when we remember that ... our judgment is based on experience, we must also see that, where this experience is incorrect and deceptive, the resulting judgment is bound to be misleading and out of touch with reality. WE HAVE TO RECOGNIZE, THEREFORE, THAT OUR SENSORY PECULIARITIES ARE THE FOUNDATION OF WHAT WE THINK OF AS OUR OPINIONS, AND THAT, IN FACT, NINE OUT OF TEN OF THE OPINIONS WE FORM ARE RATHER THE RESULT OF WHAT WE FEEL THAN WHAT WE THINK." (CCC 1946, p.92)

The last example I choose is one in which FM, while using the example of pupils "carrying instructions out correctly", comes very close to the whole picture, but the point at which he stops going back in time is again the pupil's idea or conception:

"It is only necessary to watch adult pupils at their lessons to realize that, in the great majority of cases, more or less uncontrolled emotions are a striking feature in their endeavours to carry out new instructions correctly. Watch the fixed expression of these pupils, for instance, their jerky, uncontrolled movements, and their tendency to hold the breath by assuming a harmful posture and exerting an exaggerated strain such as they would employ in performing strenuous "physical" acts. In many cases there will be a twitching of the muscles of the mouth and cheeks, or of the fingers. In each case, the stimulus to these misdirected activities is the pupil's idea or conception that he must try to do CORRECTLY whatever the teacher requests, and, as we have seen, on the subconscious plane the teacher insists upon this. The teacher of re-education on a conscious plane does not make this demand of his pupils, for he knows by experience, and has to face the fact that in cases where there is an imperfect

functioning of the organism, AN INDIVIDUAL CANNOT ALWAYS DO AS HE IS TOLD CORRECTLY. He may "want" to do it, he may "try and try again" to do it, but as long as the psycho-mechanics by which he tries to carry out his teacher's directions are not working satisfactorily, every attempt he makes to carry out his teacher's directions "correctly" (trying to be right) is bound to end in comparative failure. For in making these attempts, as we point out elsewhere, the pupil has only his own judgment to depend on as to what is correct, and since his judgment is based on incorrect direction and delusive sensory appreciation, he is held within the vicious circle of his old habits as long as he tries to carry out the directions "correctly." Paradoxical as it may seem, the pupil's only chance of success lies, not in "trying to be right," but, on the contrary, in "wanting to be wrong," wrong, that is, according to any standard of his own. In this connection, it is most important to remember that every unsuccessful "try" not only reinforces the pupil's old wrong psycho-physical habits associated with his conception of a particular act, but involves at the same time new emotional experiences of discouragement, worry, fear, and anxiety, so that the wrong experiences and the unduly excited reflex process involved in these experiences become one in the pupil's recognition; they "make the meat they feed on," and the more conscientious the teacher and the pupil are on this plan, the worse the situation becomes for both." (CCC 1946, p.130f)

[note: all emphases are FM's]

Should someone of you be lucky enough to find in FM's writings the whole sequence as John described it, could you please give me chapter and verse?

Thank you!

Peter Ruhrberg

Date: June 28, 1998, 10:41pm

To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

From David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>

Subject: replies to replies to "On Belief..."

Hi Everyone,

I've been away from my computer since I posted my long article and have now come back to see all these responses. Thank you for taking the time to read it in spite of any inward groans (as David Langstroth put it) at its length.

All this started by David Langstroth's posting about the scientific validity of the Alexander Technique stating that the A.T. has taken into account all the current knowledge. Not quite, I responded, there is a huge area of assumption in the Alexander Technique that, when looked at closely from another point of view, is misconceived or at the very least misses another much simpler explanation for what is going on. This simpler explanation implies a much simpler process for bringing about change and learning. And what ends up being learned is, in fact, very different once this misconception is seen through.

Interestingly, I have received a number of posts privately (not sent to the group) as well as the ones sent to the list. Also interestingly, I received predominantly enthusiastic ones privately and predominately critical ones publicly. I wonder what this signifies?

In ONLY ONE posting, one of the private ones, one person took the point clearly enough to realize that they need to make the same experiments I did to see if my claims are true:

I would like to think out your descriptions and comments and try to apply them to my own learning process and see what emerges. From my immediate sense of it, I expect to have some questions and also to see important things that I have learned through hands-on, as concepts, and through self-observation.

I find it ironic, given his initial posting, that David Langstroth writes in his post of June 27th, 1998:

"In effect then, LearningMethods appears to have taken some of the principles of the technique and it will likely have some of the success, if only in the short term. Without a demonstration I cannot believe that good use will just "do itself" so long as you have the right "belief system". I think it likely that David has misinterpreted the results of his experiments and is under-emphasising the misuse that remains in his students."

I wish to remind everyone that I didn't write the piece to promote LearningMethods, but to point out a misconception, or better still, a missed conception, in the Alexander work. I was merely using that example of a very different way of working with someone (the violinist) to show the contrast between the Alexander assumptions and hugely different implications of what happens when we find out what the person is really up to.

The example lesson I described is only one aspect of the LearningMethods work. Other aspects are very different, particularly those dealing with people's emotional or relationship problems. However, I am not interested in debating the virtues or limitations of LearningMethods here. For the simple reason that David L. is absolutely right. Without a demonstration, he cannot believe. I certainly am not expecting anyone to believe anything about my work. Belief does not come into it. If he was to believe simply on the basis of my writing, it would be belief without experience, which would be empty belief, not knowledge. Only through actual experiments and actual experience will anyone see what is actually going on.

However, the sole point of my long posting is my claim that The Alexander Technique has misconceived how people function, and what the problem actually is and therefore what it makes sense to do to help them. That you don't need a demonstration of. All you need is an open mind to go into your life (or your lessons with a pupil) and make the same experiments that I did. Then you will see for yourself what IS actually going on, whatever that may be. There is simply no way around the fact that until you do this, you won't even know what I am talking about, but will be interpreting my words in terms of the experience you already have.

I'm sorry, but there it is...

I am not about to try to persuade anyone of the truth of anything I say. I have already done the work, made the experiments hundreds of times, over many years now and I know what I am talking about. I can see the repeatability of these experiments day after day. Many others have also joined me and done their own experiments and consistently are finding the same thing. Maybe we are all wrong and are all misunderstanding what we are perceiving, but I doubt it. Still, if we are, then I'd like to

know about it from anyone who's done the work to follow me far enough to see where we went wrong.

It remains for any of you to either want to look into this or not. It's entirely up to you.

I shall be happy to answer any questions and debate the subject AFTER the experiments have been made. This is the way that good science works.

Having said that, there a number of misconceptions in the various postings to date that I should like to correct so that others following this discussion are not lead astray. I shall go through them one by one below:

On June 27th, 1998, John Coffin wrote:

"I am reading your 3 part post with a sort of horrified fascination. I cannot imagine how you spent so many years in and around the technique without thinking these things through before, discussing them with other teachers, or reading about them in FM's books."

How interesting, John. It sounds as if you took all that I wrote as being a description of what FM has already said and an affirmation of what the Alexander Technique already is! Am I understanding this the way you meant it? That what I wrote about as my discoveries is how you have always thought of the work?

If so, it is the first time that I have heard that from anyone. I have been a teacher for over 20 years and for most of that time I certainly HAVE BEEN thinking these things through. For instance, even back in 1984 I devoted my STAT FM Alexander Memorial Lecture to what I was just starting to find out about how our belief systems 'organize' our functioning (it's called "Thinking About Thinking About Ourselves" and you can read it on my web site at www.learningmethods.com/statlect.htm

On the web site is also another, more recent, article "The Rounder We Go, The Samer We Get", from a 1993 lecture at my training school on how to escape circular habits (www.learningmethods.com/circular.htm)

For most of the last decade I have been giving workshops helping people explore in practice all these issues, many of whom were teachers and trainees. These workshops took place in many cities in Europe, America and Australia (including in a dozen or more Alexander training schools).

In my training school for the last 9 years, where we've had lots of visiting senior teachers and others, I have also been openly exploring all these questions as well as the implications for how we need to change our ways of working to take account of what we find.

In all of these, almost without fail (and especially in recent years) the people with experience of the Alexander Technique, including teachers and trainees, have expressed their excitement or their difficulties with how different my approach is from their understanding of the Alexander Technique.

Now, something must be going on here...

I suspect that John's 'horrified fascination' is more the result of his reading my words and interpreting them in the only way he can, which is from his own background and experiences. This is not a putdown. This is the only thing any of us can do.

But I rather doubt that he would be saying the same things if he had actually seen a week-long workshop of this new work in action. And, of course, there is only one way to find this out. This is important-words just can't do it..

It seems to me that John's point of view that I am simply restating the Alexander Technique as if I had just discovered it about 20 years later than everyone else, is also, in a different way, echoed by Peter Ruhrberg in his post of June 27th, where, after various quotes from FM, he then goes on to say:

"Now, what if the phrase "and other mechanisms" in the above definition, which, together with the sensory mechanisms, are responsible for the "feeling" which we experience, was FM's way to describe what we now would call "belief system"? And could it be that the term "conception" contains more of what we could call a general idea (and sometimes belief, but not a whole belief system) which underlies our specific ideas? In this way "belief system" would go into and be part of "sensory appreciation".

I can understand the temptation to keep looking back into Alexander's writings in order to find in them intimations that FM had already seen it all, said it all and done it all. But, in order to do this, you can see that they need to 'interpret' what he wrote. Notice the "WHAT IF...such and such...was FM's way to describe..." and "COULD IT BE that the term...". Well, we'll just never know, because it is just speculation.

But perhaps we can get a better glimpse at what Alexander did mean and what he did understand if we take the entire system he created and view it as a whole. This means looking at everything he wrote and asking ourselves, did Alexander feel that what he MEANT in his writings and what he DID in practice were consistent? In other words, from the way he saw things, did what he do make sense to him? Presumably, we must answer yes to these questions otherwise the work is in big trouble.

Therefore, we only have to look at the practical means he developed to see what he was considering as the problem and how he considered it made sense to solve it.

Notice what he says in his "Evolution of a Technique" chapter, page 39 in my edition of *Use of the Self* [my capitals]:

"if, when the stimulus came to me to use my voice, I could INHIBIT THE MISDIRECTION associated with the WRONG habitual use of the my head and neck ["the pulling of my head back and down" which he mentions three paragraphs before], I should BE STOPPING OFF AT ITS SOURCE my unsatisfactory reaction to the IDEA of reciting..."

This, and every other part of his writings, seems to be unmistakably saying that his idea of the misdirection was "the pulling of my head back and down". This is what he is calling "wrong". This is what he is "inhibiting". And this is what he regards as the "source of his unsatisfactory reaction".

Hence the necessity of teaching pupils to inhibit immediate action and/or inhibit any pullings down. Hence the directing of heads and necks, and also hence the teacher guiding the pupil into the 'new experiences of good use associated with the directions', etc.

Whatever Alexander may or may not have meant, I would venture to say that what is more important when we are looking at what IS the Alexander Technique today, is what most teachers think he meant! And how they are acting accordingly because of their conception of the work...

I'll also say that if FM had meant what I mean in my piece and if FM had understood what I have come to understand through my own and others' experiences and practice, then I cannot see how he could have remained advocating such an approach. To remain unchanged would imply that he, or anyone else, would have entirely missed the significance of what I writing about.

Take my example of the violinist. Every Alexander teacher she had gone to had worked with 'giving her better experiences', had worked with her to release the tension in her arm and had got her to direct to free her neck. None had even thought to find out what was different about those times when she had the symptoms and when she didn't, nor to invite her see that her whole belief system (trying to play better WILL help me play better) was at direct odds with her own experience (I actually play worse), nor in her moments of playing to make an experiment whereby she does not react, where she tries nothing and changes nothing (neither the tension, nor her head-neck), but simply to not react to the situation in her normal belief-inspired actions of trying to play better.

John Coffin also wrote:

"Please read Use of the Self. Searching for the differences between his reaction to the stimulus to speak in ordinary situations versus his reaction to the stimulus to 'recite' was one of the earliest experiments Alexander performed!"

In Alexander's "Evolution of a Technique" chapter, he got as far as seeing that his 'misdirection' was a "reaction to the idea of reciting". But he didn't go the next step to really see specifically WHAT THAT IDEA WAS. He didn't, of course, because he thought he already had found the "source of the reaction"--namely, the "pulling of my head back and down."

If he had thought, "Ah, it's a reaction to my idea of reciting! I wonder just what is it about MY IDEA of reciting that I am reacting to?", he might have made the kind of connection I posited in my hypothetical new "Evolution of a Technique" chapter.

Almost exactly the same physical pattern of functioning as Alexander's shows up in many performers who feel that they have to do something to perform (often these 'somethings' are 'good techniques' that they have been taught for years by teachers who share the same belief system). It is very easy to get them to experience what they do when they start performing by simply getting them to stop just after they begin and be a 'normal citizen' again, then go back to performing. What they are doing when they start again will usually stick out like a sore thumb and they can see, "Oh that, but I HAVE TO DO THAT!"

Interestingly, it is essential to realize that, while Alexander people on the outside of the student might see them pull their heads back or lift their chests (unconstructive misuses), that IS NOT what they on the inside think or feel that THEY ARE DOING. They think (and feel) that they are 'gaining support', getting air reserve', etc. (all quite positive and necessary 'techniques'). All I need to do then is to invite them to make the experiment to not 'get support', or

'get air' and see what happens when they DON'T DO what their reinforced belief system tells them they 'HAVE' to do.

No hands on needed, no inhibiting heads back or chests lifting and no directing. In fact, as I said, it would make NO SENSE to do any of that, but would only obscure what they WERE ACTUALLY DOING and get them heading off down a long and tortuous path to gain control over their functioning (what John C. calls: "the enormous task" [of] "learning and teaching how to direct ourselves consciously, IN ACTION"). I would put forward that he's right. It is an enormous task. But it's enormous because we don't work that way and it gets incredibly complicated and tortuous when we try to do something that we do not need to do when we see through this misconception.

David Langstroth wrote on June 27th, 1998:

"Let us start with the violinist example. David describes how "trying to play really well" was associated with the arm problems that she complained of. And, when she was finally able to change this "belief system", and to play without caring, her performance was musically better and pain free. This is a great description of how "trying" is usually associated with an increase in muscular effort and a deterioration of the quality of the psycho-physical performance. As such it is a valuable illustration of a principle that Alexander goes on about at great length. I would disagree with David however that it represents a new discovery."

Alexander may write on at great length about this general territory, but as far as I can see he never, ever, worked with anyone the way that I described working with the violinist. He seems to have regarded the problem at hand to be the person's 'use' which to him appears to have meant their state of physical/functional coordination and as such he would have (and did) worked with them hands-on to change that 'malcoordination' to a better 'use'.

If he ever worked with someone only on directly revealing their 'concepts' (since you prefer that term to belief systems or constructs) AND then on revealing what actions people took based on those concepts (and here I do not mean their unconscious use of pulling down, etc.), AND then with helping them make experiments based directly from that knowledge, he does not seem to have left a record of it as a process we could profitably follow.

David Langstroth also writes:

"Secondly, although she has been helped to some extent by learning to stop trying to be right, I am concerned that our violinist has missed out on the opportunity to really deal with her problems. I would suggest that she is still left with the same patterns of misuse as before, but as she is not trying so hard, they are just less exaggerated. Such was the case with Alexander who, as David points out, "noticed that the same pattern was happening in his normal speaking in daily life but much less exaggerated".

Who gets to decide when she has 'solved' her problem? The teacher or the student? As far as I am concerned if people come to me with a 'problem', (and THEY get to decide what THEIR problem is, not me), and I can help them to see what was the misconception causing the problem, and what was their reaction or action they took because of that misconception, and as they change their action/reaction then the 'problem' disappears FOR THEM, then THE PROBLEM HAS DISAPPEARED (THEY being the only judge for THEMSELVES).

The fallacy you are caught in is still to see things from your Alexander background. You are assuming, or are concerned, that this 'pattern of misuse' thing must exist, however subtle or exaggerated, like some kind of original sin. NEVER HAVING SEEN this person, you ASSUME that she has a pattern of misuse even when she is not playing. Only someone with a 'habit' of Alexander conception could make such an arrogant assumption. Whatever adaptive or mal-adaptive functioning patterns this person may or may not have, if SHE has no 'problem' with them, who are YOU, ME or ANYONE to say otherwise?

As the Americans say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" And, "When the call gets through, hang up!"

Next, David L. writes:

"But, if all our violinist has received is a new "belief system", that is, the idea that she ought not to care, or to try to be right, I would be very concerned for her long term future. I cannot imagine that the long term effects of that particular "belief system" as it becomes fixed will be positive."

This makes me wonder how carefully you read my piece. Let me quote from it:

"For our violinist, the tension was happening to her. She didn't say to herself, "now I'll tense my arm and make it hurt." It just happened--she didn't even want it. It was important for her to realize that the 'starting to care' was also happening to her. She didn't say, "hmm, now I'll start to care here. Yes, there it is, now I've got it. I'm starting to care." She just found herself caring more at some times than at others. This is clear if we look at it the other way around. If she mistook her caring for the problem and tried to change it, just how would she do that? Can you decide not to care? If you try it, does it really work?"

You'll note that I was quite explicit that we WERE NOT GOING TO ASK HER TO NOT CARE. This is impossible, let alone being helpful. What I did was to find out what she started TO DO BECAUSE she cared. Then to suggest that she make an experiment to see what would happen if she didn't REACT to her caring the way she normally did (by trying to play well).

David Langstroth continues:

"Are we really to believe that her psycho-physical health and her career as a violinist will be enhanced over the long term because she is developing the habit of "not caring", without attending to the (now more subtly expressed) misuse from which her problems stem?"

She is the only one to judge that and the only way we'd know is to ask her. But here David L. is again falling into the assumption that her problems stem from the Alexander sense of what I am calling the physical/functional co-ordination patterns of pulling down, shortening, etc. What if her 'problems' stem instead from what she REALLY IS DOING (trying to play well, because she is afraid she won't)? Remember this 'doing' only makes sense to do from the basis of her belief system (trying will help me play better), a belief that is easily seen to be untrue.

Again, you don't HAVE to believe anything. In order to assess the truth in what I am saying though, you DO HAVE TO do the experiments of trying it for yourself like my lonely correspondent is willing to do! Can you really think of any other way to know?

To address the last part of the sentence (the "...without attending to the (now more subtly expressed misuse from which her problems stem..." part)... What happens for people is that once they begin to see how their 'conceptions' are channelling them into certain actions which don't, in fact, work for them and as they begin to see their 'reality' differently, first in the situation in which their symptoms initially arose (the playing, for our violinist), they soon begin to see how they have that same viewpoint and 'conception' in other areas of their life. They then can (and do) make similar experiments on these areas. It is remarkable how much change does take place in a very short a time when people REALLY GET AT THE SOURCE of their problem (their faulty 'reality appreciation or misconception), instead of keeping on trying to change the physical or functional coordination of that misconception.

When David says: "I cannot believe that good use will just "do itself" so long as you have the right 'belief system'", he has also failed to understand what I wrote:

"Fortunately for us, just like in the train, we don't need to come up with a new and more accurate construct. Your system has millions of years of experience at that and will happily manufacture another one in short order. And it will be intrinsically MORE ACCURATE than the last because it has to take all these new facts and contradictions into account."

That he says that he cannot believe that good use will just happen when the belief system changes, shows me that he has not seen the events I am describing taking place.

It is inevitable that your life will work better if your 'reality' construct more accurately matches how the universe actually works. The very fact that so many people have so many problems is symptomatic of the degree that their belief systems are way out of line with how things work.

The idea that there are 'unconscious habit patterns of misuse' like pulling down, etc. is an example of such an idea. To say that they are unconscious habits doesn't explain anything. The 'unconscious' part is like a black box where we stick the events which we can see happening but don't why they are happening. Because our assumptions are that these 'unconscious habits' ARE the problem, of course we are dutybound to become conscious of them and control them.

On the other hand when we change our point of view and see WHY they are happening--they are simply the natural coordination of what the human being is actually consciously up to, then we can see that these coordinations are not the problem. This is easy to see, because when we get the person to stop doing what they were doing, that coordination is immediately changed too. The real 'misuse' was in what the person was doing, not how their wonderful 'system' was organizing what they were doing. And 'misuse' isn't even the word here--it is a delusion as to the way the universe (oneself included) actually works.

By the way, anyone is more than welcome to come along and see what does go on in a class. But I can say it again, you will learn a great deal more from carrying out these experiments for yourself. But if anyone insists on trying to interpret what I or anyone else is saying from within their existing creed without these experiments, they will only see what they already see.

warmly,
David

Date: Mon, 29 Jun 1998
 From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
 To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
 Subject: David Gorman, belief systems, questions and consistency

Hello David, and all,

First of all, I wish to thank David for his article (and his response to responses) and for sharing with us his process of questioning, experimenting and learning which leads him -- and maybe us -- to a changed and evolving understanding and teaching.

I think David describes very well the kind of process in thinking that every one of us is invited to go through in order to change and grow, even if each and every one of us comes to different conclusions and therefore different practices and different results.

In response to his response, I'd like to share some of my thoughts with regard to the question of belief systems, my way of asking questions, and the consistency of FM's principles and his teaching practices.

David Gorman wrote (28/06/98):

"I can understand the temptation to keep looking back into Alexander's writings in order to find in them intimations that FM had already seen it all, said it all and done it all. But, in order to do this, you can see that they need to 'interpret' what he wrote. Notice the "WHAT IF...such and such...was FM's way to describe..." and "COULD IT BE that the term...". Well, we'll just never know, because it is just speculation."

Let me explain to you why I ask those questions in this way. It may take a while, but I'll come back to it.

It is my experience that every one whom I have come to know has a belief system which is different from practically everyone else's, and well endowed with these belief systems everyone of us is likely to read into Mr Alexander's words meanings that make sense to US, according to our concepts and conceptions based on our belief system.

"We all think and act (except when forced to do otherwise) in accordance with the peculiarities of our particular psycho-physical make-up." (CCC 1946, p.93)

In this connection, the violinist lesson that David Gorman shared with us in his article is a really good example of the power that we have and with which we make come true almost every belief that we have about WHAT WE HAVE TO DO in order to carry out a particular activity.

Now, some of our beliefs about what we have to do to carry out a particular task might actually be true, or as FM called it, "best suited to the purpose". This means that, when we go into activity, our organism is working in the way that is most efficient for the task at hand.

Some of our beliefs of what to do in order to carry out an activity might not be true, in which case our organism tries whatever he can to carry out what we think we need to do for our particular activity, but at the same time he is very busy in trying to stay in balance in order to keep us alive.

And, as David Gorman realized in his experients, a perfectly coordinated pattern of the organism presents itself IN BOTH CASES, perfectly suited to our intentions, and totally consistent with our beliefs and conceptions. There is nothing "wrong" with our organisms.

Now, I'm perfectly aware that all of these ideas above, as well as all of David's ideas, are just interpretations of our experiences, and they also might be right or wrong.

The point I'm trying to make here it that no matter what we believe, our perfectly made organism (or "mechanism", if you prefer FM's word) seems to work in a way that he will try to make our beliefs come true

each and every time, even at the cost of unnecessary muscular tension, pain, or even creating damage in the organism. So "be careful what you decide to believe, in the end it might come true".

BUT, as everyone knows, we have the ability to choose. And if we can choose to believe almost anything, and if our organism is able of putting our beliefs and conceptions into action so successfully that what we believe seems REAL to us, and if it is true that there are many beliefs that we can choose from, then wouldn't it make sense to choose beliefs which might help us, and put them into action, experiment with them and see what happens? I think this is just the way that David showed us in his article. (This is one of the reasons why I'm so grateful to him for sharing his findings with us.)

Now, back to the question above, "why do I ask questions in this way."

I do it this way because when we are reading Alexander and try to understand and deal with his ideas, I'd like to make clear that there is the same perfect organism (mechanism) at work -- which can make our beliefs come true -- when we are thinking about what FM could have meant. And maybe there never will be any final judgment or agreement about what FM meant.

But, wouldn't it make sense to question again and again our beliefs and concepts about what FM meant and, in the same way described above, to choose those beliefs which might help us, put them into action and see what happens?

You see, I think that questioning constantly and consistently his beliefs and concepts is one of the things that Alexander did in order to learn his work.

One of the questions which everyone has to decide for himself is whether FM's teaching practices were entirely consistent with his principles. David Gorman wrote about this:

"Perhaps we can get a better glimpse at what Alexander did mean and what he did understand if we take the entire system he created and view it as a whole. This means looking at everything he wrote and asking ourselves, did Alexander feel that what he MEANT in his writings and what he DID in practice were consistent? In other words, from the way he saw things, did what he do make sense to him? Presumably, we must answer yes to these questions otherwise the work is in big trouble."

There are some examples in the literature which suggest to me that FM was perhaps not too happy with his approach to teaching his pupils.

"This is not easy. If you can tell me how I can get this across to my pupils in a better way, you will be doing a great service to mankind." (G. Binkley, *The Expanding Self*, p.100)

".. he said that he had to write down what he knew, in case "none of us was any good", and that "the work might die out". If the books were there, somebody might be able to work out the practical procedures from what he had written." (Marjory Barlow, *Reminiscences of FM*, Congress Sydney 1994)

Again, all we have is speculation. But however FM's attitude towards his own teaching practices might have been, if we are going to teach, we have to evaluate our own practices in learning and teaching according to our understanding of the PRINCIPLES of the work (be it the AT or anything else, for that matter), and come to our own decisions of how to teach it, based on our reasoning, experiments, and experience.

And this very process is also an example of what I would call "Mr Alexander's Technique".

Peter Ruhrberg

Date: Mon, 29 Jun 1998

To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

From: JohnC10303@aol.com

Subject: Re: More on Gorman essay

Hello list:

Well here's a how-d'ye-do. If we question Mr. Gorman's claims of originality for his new work, we are "interpreting them in the only way (w)e can, which is from (our) own background and experiences." and must attend a week-long workshop. What does this say about those who ACCEPT his claims? I catch a whiff of 'heads I win, tails you lose' in this thread.

I have learned in my 15 years in and around the Technique that one is unlikely to overestimate the rigidity of mind and unteachability of Alexander Teachers. This would be tragic in any field, but is unbearably poignant in our case.

On the positive side, the last decade or so has brought about a 'shaking out' of attitudes and hidebound traditions that may yet ensure that the Technique has a future. In the midst of a tirade against Marj Barstow, David Alexander remarked something to the effect that: "whatever else she does, no one can burst the bubble of a hotshot STAT robot the way she can." I recall how, during a teacher's workshop, Marj's asking "why do you do that?" could bring someone to a dead stop in mid demonstration; they had no idea that their approach was riddled with unreasoned ritual and blind imitation.

During the Sturm und Drang of the founding of NASTAT, I heard many 'Marjites' make airy claims about how they were 'beyond' the teaching practices of the rest of us. Many of those same people went on to discover that Marj's immense skill included techniques like the table and the 'whispered ah' which she had not used much, if at all, in group settings. In both these cases, the result (at least some of the time) was constructive self-questioning and growth.

This said, I want to say that David has made a strong pendulum swing away from 'directing the Primary Control,' and 'inhibiting misuses' and back towards 'inhibiting a too quick reaction to stimuli,' and 'staying with the means-whereby.' This is a Good Thing. The clear statement of the idea that the particular manifestations of misuse (e.g. pulling back the head) are expressions of Primary Control, operating under the constraints of end-gaining and incorrect conception is a tremendous coup. With this in mind, we could shed a lot of ritualized 'ordering' and give more attention to the importance of inhibition on the broadest basis, rather than trying to inhibit an ever growing laundry list of specific tensions.

Lulie Westfeldt, Frank Jones and Goddard Binkley all hint at the idea that Alexander may have put too much reliance on his spectacular manual skill in his later years. It is likely that generations of teachers have worried far too much about giving the 'right kind' of chair turn and not nearly enough about questioning the pupil's thinking.

Still and all, Mr. Gorman has not presented any principle that justifies the formation of a new 'system.' The efficacy of his current teaching does not demonstrate that any new discovery is involved. End-gaining and incorrect conception are worthy bases for a new focus and a rethinking of our teaching methods. We have all probably overemphasized Primary Control as a tool for re-conditioning instead of a phenomenon which operates at all times whether we 'direct' it or not.

I also find it a little precious of David to express reluctance to put forth his revelations and disclaim any promotion of his new system when he has already set up an elaborate web site with a new logo, training offers and pitches for workshops.

John Coffin

Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998 06:10:07 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Reply to John Coffin

Hi everyone,

I am glad to see a number of people addressing the original issue I raised, namely, that when we include 'what people ARE actually up to' at the moments when 'Alexander misuse' is happening, does this afford us a different interpretation of what is going on?

There has been some interesting debate on this subject, particularly about whether, in fact, the Alexander Technique already covers this territory.

This, of course, would depend a great deal on what you mean by the Alexander Technique. Remember, there is no 'thing' out there called 'the Alexander Technique'. Alexander is dead and cannot tell us what he considered it to be, though there are his books. There are also the Alexander Technique of the various 'very senior' teachers who trained with FM, but they differ so much between themselves that they cannot agree. The only other 'Alexander Technique' is the personal understanding that each student or teacher has for themselves. This obviously varies a great deal also.

Therefore, let me be plain as to what I am referring to when I say 'the premises of the Alexander Technique'. I

AM NOT referring to what Alexander wrote, since we can only interpret those and the huge diversity of 'styles' you see around us shows us how diverse these interpretations are.

I AM referring to what is most commonly done by teachers all over the world in the name of the Alexander Technique. The Technique, 'collectively', as it is actually lived, taught, and described by teachers.

Necessarily, how I see this is ONLY MY VIEW, albeit one from a great deal of travel, personal contact and experience. This 'collective' Alexander will probably change over time. But this present-moment Alexander Technique is the one that the public usually gets when they go to a teacher. The is the one that is described in teacher's brochures, books and web pages as being about the hands-on experience, about movement re-education and about freeing of heads/necks/backs, etc.

If any of you think that you are already seeing how people function and the way things work in a different way than this Alexander 'collective', perhaps in a way more similar way to what I am describing, then that is just a fact of how you do see it. I would suggest, though, this is NOT the way that many or most teachers do think of the work.

Many of the people who have written in to me privately have expressed that what I have written has been "enlightening" and "stimulating" for them. They have also expressed thanks to me for being so "bold" and "courageous" as to post this. I can see why I am getting some of these posts privately rather than publicly when I experience the tone of John Coffin's recent reply to me.

His responses are coming quite close to the 'ad hominum' attacks that David Langstroth and others have decried. I certainly get the feeling that John is unhappy that I have had the temerity to claim that I have discovered anything and especially to strike off on my own and start my own work, rather than stay in the fold--almost as if I am taking something away from the Alexander Technique by leaving, then daring to challenge its principles.

He writes:

"Well here's a how-d'ye-do. If we question Mr. Gorman's claims of originality for his new work, we are "interpreting them in the only way (w)e can, which is from (our) own background and experiences." and must attend a week-long workshop. What does this say about those who ACCEPT his claims? I catch a whiff of 'heads I win, tails you lose' in this thread."

and further down,

"I also find it a little precious of David to express reluctance to put forth his revelations and disclaim any promotion of his new system when he has already set up an elaborate web site with a new logo, training offers and pitches for workshops."

Remember what Nina A. wrote recently to John:

"I have to say that this type of language ... is uncalled for, and shows a lack of respect for others. It may not be to your use, or liking, but casting aspersions on belief systems or philosophies of others certainly makes me wary of engaging you in dialogue, lest I be cast aside with such dismissal."

So, whether or not my interpretation of John's response is correct, I should like to request that everyone makes an attempt (even if you don't feel it) to respect any person

who writes in and debate the issues only. The purpose of this list is to have as many people as possible in the discussion, not to have the thing dominated by the strongest voices, which will happen unless great care is taken. It is obvious that many others have things to say, but in the current climate it seems that they feel they can only do it privately... This is by no means 'their' problem.

I think feelings may be rising because two separate issues are being mingled here--one being my challenges to the Alexander beliefs, which John deals with very clearly and articulately in the middle section of his message, and the other being whatever new work I am now doing.

Hence John writes:

"Still and all, Mr. Gorman has not presented any principle that justifies the formation of a new 'system.' The efficacy of his current teaching does not demonstrate that any new discovery is involved."

So, I shall repeat what I said in my last posting:

I am interested in debating the issue of whether there is something missing or misconceived in the Alexander Technique (this collective one, remember), that limits the Alexander work. I have proposed my ideas of what this is, along with another way to see what happens for people.

This I AM interested in debating with you. I AM NOT interested in debating (and will not debate) whether my work is or is not valid or original. None of these respondents have ANY direct experience of the nature or range of my work. All you have is a small written snippet of a lesson which I used as an example and which is only one aspect of my work among many, in any case. Furthermore, there is NO POSSIBILITY of a real debate on the validity or originality of my work until anyone HAS WITNESSED what I do. This is a fact.

My work is not called the Alexander Technique any longer, so why on earth would anyone care what it does or does not do? If you're happy where you are, why change? (And of course, like anyone, I am definitely promoting my work on my web pages and elsewhere (thanks for the free publicity, John)--however, I am not trying to promote it here in this discussion.)

But the real point for this discussion is that there is also NO POSSIBILITY of a real debate even on the issue of the validity of the premises of the Alexander Technique in the light of my challenge, until whoever wants to debate has done the experiments for themselves of correlating people's actual thoughts/feelings/actions, AS EXPERIENCED BY THOSE PEOPLE, with the physical/functional coordinations AS SEEN BY ANY OUTSIDER.

If any of you feel that you have already done that, then please bring forward what you have found and how it relates to what makes sense to do to help someone. AND how you feel this relates to the 'Alexander Technique' as it usually practiced. Some of you are doing that and as David Langstroth says in his recent post, then we can debate the interpretations. I shall be replying to him in a separate posting.

John also writes:

"I have learned in my 15 years in and around the Technique that one is unlikely to overestimate the rigidity of mind and unteachability of Alexander Teachers."

If what John says is true, this is a sad commentary on the state of this work which talks of flexibility, openness, change and learning. If anyone should be embodying these qualities, one would think it would be the teachers? If not, what on earth are they teaching? Perhaps it would be profitable for Alexander organizations, trainers, and teachers to look at WHY this may be so...

There may be some clues when John writes in the middle section so clearly about what could be the over-emphasis on the hands-on experience and the discounting of thinking and conception, and:

"On the positive side, the last decade or so has brought about a 'shaking out' of attitudes and hidebound traditions that may yet ensure that the Technique has a future... they had no idea that their approach was riddled with unreasoned ritual and blind imitation."

What could possibly have happened to the Technique to inculcate such "hidebound tradition", "unreasoned ritual" and "blind imitation"? If we aren't going to take the easy road and assume it is the pupil's fault for misunderstanding our wonderful teaching ("I'd be a wonderful teacher if it wasn't for my pupils"), then we must look straight at the whole way that the Technique has been taught in training and in lessons.

As Mortimer Adler says in his wonderful book "Reforming Education" (Adler worked for years with Dewey at the University of Chicago):

"The doctrinal is an attempt to read as much truth as possible (and no errors) in the work of an author, usually devising a special interpretation, or by discovering the special secret of an author's intentions... It is the opposite of the dialectical method, where the aim is learning to think and the pursuit of truth."

The word 'disciple' stresses the difference between the doctrinal and the dialectic teaching... The doctrinal teaching of disciples enables them to learn what the master thinks. The dialectic teaching of students enables them to think for themselves. I would go further and say that the doctrinal method indoctrinates, and only the dialectic method teaches."

One of the best ways out of "hidebound traditions" and "unreasoned ritual" and "imitation" is to go right back to the events in front of us, and look at them anew--without our current filters (as much as that can be done). This is only possible, of course, when one knows what one's belief systems/constructs/conceptions are, otherwise we will inevitably mistake them for 'reality' and never think to question them. These 'pre-conceived ideas' aren't just 'ideas'. Anyone going into a lesson (indeed, into life) with them intact will think they already 'know' what is happening and therefore act accordingly.

But, if we can begin to know our own thoughts and perceptions, and if we can take them as our current construct, NOT AS REALITY, then we have a chance to see what really happens as it happens without the 'preconceived ideas' spawned by tradition and ritual.

In teaching (or training) this translates as not trying to get the pupil to see things the way the teacher does (so that if they can successfully see things the way the teacher does, they have 'learned'), but rather to find out what the pupil does see, to help them make experiments, many of which will lead them nowhere or up blind alleys, to help them

recognize when they have lead nowhere, and to help them recognize in their own perception what they have discovered, and encourage them to act on their discoveries, and to recognize when the results of these actions throw up new learning or new data that needs new experiments, and so on.

A change like this also means teachers need to stop answering questions from their pupils in favour of saying back to them, "that's a good question of yours. How are YOU going to answer it?". To a student a teacher's answer is ALWAYS the 'right' answer (usually to the teacher too). The student's answer for themselves can only come from their perception of what is happening. It doesn't matter how 'right' it is because as they develop the 'habit' of seeing for themselves, they will always be updating their answers as they see more clearly what is happening.

This produces a teacher who has learned for themselves, who cannot possibly have hidebound tradition, since there wasn't any tradition; who can't possibly have unreasoned ritual since they weren't taught any rituals, and who can't possibly imitate (at least successfully), since the whole process only goes somewhere when they use their own unique thoughts and experiments and perceptions.

I know about this one because this is a change I made in my own training course after the first few years of running it. It was a major challenge for me to let go of making sure that the trainees got the experience they should have and understood what they need to understand. Instead to allow them to get their own answer and understand what they did, no matter if I could see it was full of holes. It took a great deal of trust in the process to keep up with it until I could actually see a year or two later that they were growing and discarding previous understandings in favour of more accurate ones.

A little quote from Dewey (or at least attributed to Dewey, though I don't know where it came from):

"You may as well say you have sold.

*When no one has bought,
As to say you have taught,
When no one has learned..."*

warmly,

David

Date: Tue, 30 Jun 1998
To: JohnC10303@aol.com, alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: Rrick2@aol.com
Subject: Re: Re: More on Gorman essay

In a message dated 6/29/98 3:30:14 PM, John Coffin wrote:

"During the Sturm und Drang of the founding of NASTAT, I heard many 'Marjites' make airy claims about how they were 'beyond' the teaching practices of the rest of us. Many of those same people went on to discover that Marj's immense skill included techniques like the table and the 'whispered ah' which she had not used much, if at all, in group settings. In both these cases, the result (at least some of the time) was constructive self-questioning and growth."

I wonder about this. No doubt some were guilty of their own brand of arrogance. But "many"? There aren't many

to start with and most of the ones I know (and I've met the majority of them) didn't share that attitude.

One other point: Marj used the whispered ahh frequently in group settings, at least since the early 80s.

Robert Rickover

Date: Tue, 30 Jun 1998
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
Subject: Re: More on Gorman essay

Hello list: and Robert:

It was certainly 'many' in the group who met with NASTAT planners at ATI back in 80-something. I know that at ATI people (like me) were beginning to ask Marj about ahs, table, etc. in the early 80s. The simplicity and clarity of her 'take' on these procedures was quite a jolt to me back then. I still wonder how much we give up to devote so much time and thought to flashy hands-on tricks at the expense of Thinking.

If I had only thought to ask about hands-on-chair!

John Coffin

Date: Tue, 30 Jun 1998
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: A final thought on belief systems

Dear all,

I would just like to add a comment on the nature of "good science". David Gorman in his most recent posting has attempted to dismiss criticism with the statement, *"I shall be happy to answer any questions and debate the subject AFTER the experiments have been made. this the way that good science works."*

This position unfortunately both misconstrues the nature of "good science" and misrepresents the nature of most (thought not all) of the criticisms that I have seen on this list. Most criticisms have not questioned the results (that the violinist played without pain for example) but have addressed themselves to the way in which David has interpreted these results. It is not valid to dismiss these criticisms by implying that without having done the experiments there can be no comment.

Reference to any scientific journal or forum would illustrate that "good science" embraces the debate over what a particular set of results means. Science is not just the obtaining of results but also includes analysis and interpretation, an activity which involves reasoning and in which first hand experience of the results is actually unnecessary. If it were, then every "good scientist" would have to repeat every experiment that had ever gone before.

When I have written in the past about the repeatability of science this refers to the necessity of being able to repeat experiments to check the results. Experiments don't have to be repeated when the results are accepted as described, when the debate focuses on the theorization and interpretation that has been built on top of those results.

Best Wishes,

David Langstroth, david@alexandertec.u-net.com, Cardiff, Wales

Date: Tue, 30 Jun 1998
From: john wynhausen <wynhaus@clandjop.com>
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
Subject: D.G. 's sonata in 3 parts

I just read quickly through David Gorman's detailed description of his breakthrough and I found it very thought provoking. There were several points in there that are certainly lessons for me and perhaps for all of us.

One that jumped out at me was his description of how he was teaching. He was teaching in essence the way he learned... by imitation. Learning by imitation is how much learning takes place. We watch the teacher, we copy what the teacher does, and hopefully we don't become such good imitators that we don't have to think about what we're doing. D. G. describes how he eventually came to see what he was doing as inadequate and discovered a key missing element in his understanding.

That key, the beliefs of the student, I would agree are a vital piece of the teaching/learning equation. What is more primary than what, I am not so sure of, but belief/faith is certainly primary. It sounds from David's essay like we all put too much faith in our will to do at the expense of this miraculous little servant we call the body.

I borrow from lots of disciplines. One I sometimes borrow from is Transactional Analysis. It seems that often in teaching, especially in the beginning of a student/teacher relationship, the teacher takes on a role as Parent and the student the role as Child. This is when the teacher must in a sense be the parent to the child a somehow inoculate the child with faith, faith in life, faith in God, faith in the twelve steps, faith in the Alexander Technique, faith in "shit happens." Hopefully this stage in the relationship won't get bogged down and the child will open up to learning and start learning to think for themselves.

Musicians, especially violinists, have pretty strict superegos. Some of them also have super egos. It's easy to see how David's approach might work pretty well in the case of the violinist. He seemed to find just the right words to reach his students critical "I" (the superego) and get that bugger to stop bugging. Violinists are already pretty well trained and have to be pretty coordinated to do what they do. It would seem that they would not need a lot of physical attention to their coordination. David presents a clear illustration of why this is the case. What David seems to realize is something I am still learning, that thought directs energy. But what is beautiful about AT is that for us retards, for whom energy directs thought, we can have the experience in our bodies first and later come back and start learning how to think.

Thanks David and list,
John

Date: 01 Jul 1998 07:20 EDT
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: "Jim Whiteside" <whitesid@nortel.ca>
Subject: David's Teaching Technique

David,

Your introspective approach is very interesting, especially about getting the person to stay in the moment. What do you do about prevention, i.e. someone who has come for lessons but who has no pain or noticeable difficulties?

Regards Jim

Date: Tue, 2 July 1998
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: David's Teaching Technique
July 2, 1998

Message text written by "Jim Whiteside", July 1, 1998
"Your introspective approach is very interesting, especially about getting the person to stay in the moment. What do you do about prevention, i.e. someone who has come for lessons but who has no pain or noticeable difficulties?"

Jim,

The simplest answer is: nothing. If someone has no particular problems, I tell them that they are lucky and why not just enjoy their life while they can. IF, later on they do notice 'problems' or 'symptoms', THEN is the time to look into what they are symptoms of...

What happens next will depend on why that particular person came.

If they really do have no difficulties, but nonetheless are interested in learning and how it works and how to help other people learn, then of course they are welcome to stay and see what happens for people who do have difficulties--how these people can come to understand what the difficulty is, where and what their misconceptions and faulty 'reality' appreciation are, what kind of specific experiments or processes they can use to see what really happens when they are not busy re-confirming their current belief system, etc. This they will learn from and end up knowing a great deal more about the underlying nature of people's problems, about why they are so caught, and about what someone needs to learn to be liberated from these 'problems'. To reach the understanding necessary to help someone else learn, they will, of course, need to learn to see it from the other person's point of view, since they themselves may not have had those experiences in their own life.

Usually, when people have stayed to see what happens for others, they begin to bring out their own problems. Problems that they didn't think were relevant to the territory of 'the work'. That is they may bring in a problem they have with their low value of themselves, or a problem fear about losing love, or a fear of flying, or other issues that they initially thought were 'out of bounds' or 'private' or in the realm of some other work, therapy perhaps.

If, on the other hand, they are not so interested in looking at how learning works for specific people on specific issues, AND they really don't have any problems, but still want to learn about prevention, I ask them prevention of what? What is the point in learning about prevention of something you don't have and may never have. "Sufficient unto the day, are the problems thereof", to paraphrase.

Often, this point of view in someone reveals a belief system. Usually it goes something like this: "There are lots

of 'problems' lurking out there. I don't have one now, but I could get one later. What do I need to do to make sure that I don't?" Challenging this usually brings up a lack-of-trust issue for that person, as in, "But I don't trust that my 'system' will function well without me watching over 'it'" And, "If something does go 'wrong', I'm not sure that I notice it 'in time' and be able to deal with it then".

A person with this 'construct' has not yet learned that their wonderful system will send a message if there is anything 'wrong' (or unconstructive). These messages are what most people call the 'problem' or the 'symptom'. That is the wake-up call to notice what is happening that may need changing. Then, as one understands why there was a problem and changes, they will have learned something they didn't know before and will be living in a different world where the problem won't happen because they are not caught in the misconception that created it.

But before they learn this they will have the current belief system they do have. From that belief system's point of view there is no way to prevent anything, because you do not yet have the knowledge to even see how your current constructs and actions will inevitably lead to those 'problems' and 'symptoms'.

However, this is not a problem, as most people think. Life is for living, not improving. When we just live life, life will give us the lessons we need when we need them. That is, this is fundamental change in construct from "there are problems we need to solve and to prevent so that later we can live better", to "we are living now and enjoying what we have for what it is; there are also many opportunities for learning which just come up by themselves when life shows us that we have misconceived how things work and hence are working against the way things work; these are wonderful opportunities because as we learn, everything works even better.

From this letter point of view it would be pointless to prevent the very learning that life presents to us by trying to do some prior 'learning' about some general territory that is not in our direct experience in order to avoid the later learning where all the actual material is there to learn from anyway.

I hope this longer answer explains how I feel about prevention. My experience has lead me to see that we have such a wonderful system that we already have all the information available to us in our own perception and we also have another characteristic, our intelligence that allows us to understand the significance of this information when we are in the moment enough with what is happening to see it for what it is.

What robs us of being able to put these two together to learn (that is, to continually revise our constructs more and more accurately) is that we are fixed in whatever current construct we have and have already projected it onto the events in front of us. The first step, in other words, is to learn how to use the moments of the symptoms as a way to take in that which will show the flaws in our construct...

warmly,
David

Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998
From: Patrick Snook <patrick.snook@yale.edu>

To: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de> cc: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: David Gorman, belief systems, questions and consistency

A preliminary thought or two on this and its related thread: David Gorman appears to have taken up the gauntlet thrown by Alexander when he said "*If you want to do what I do you must do what I did . . .*".

The violinist example provides a unique opportunity for an excellent illustration, and for a swift experiment. For a musician, the stimulus associated with performance (of which the symptoms are usually "nerves") can usually be summonsed from within in front of almost any audience (i.e. it's easy to "get nervous" about playing for people), although to be sure it takes some courage to face the symptoms, and nerves themselves can be unpredictable. I wonder though if this example--while serving the written word and the essay form perfectly--might not be another thunderbolt-on-the-road-to-Damascus account, and therefore (to change metaphorical donkeys in midstream) another "dagger of the mind", in Alexander's phrase. I've written here before about my thought that the AT has more to say about lifelong learning than about sudden, cathartic, revelatory, therapeutic whatever. (Undoubtedly, the AT may produce its insights, and, for some, its cures, but I suspect that we will wait in vain for these moments to arrive.)

My teacher enjoyed telling me that betimes Macdonald would smilingly lament, at the age of 64 or so, "Don't worry, the first 64 years are the hardest". He would also confess that in all his years of teaching he had never felt like putting his hands on a pupil. Add that comment to Peter Ruhrberg's quotations of Alexander's disatisfactions with his own teaching, and we have an inkling of what it takes to be a good teacher. (I think that teaching happens by default, whatever and however good the teacher's intention. As Macdonald's boxing coach said to him, "I can teach you this, but I can't learn you." Perfect.)

I did take from Gorman's essay the important lesson and reminder that the AT above all is experimental (that term can be found in F. P. Jones's writings too), in the scientific sense: "*What happens if I don't . . . and instead I think up?*" My teacher used this language often. If only I'd listened

Preliminary thoughts, as I said. For me now, back to square one.

Patrick

Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998
From: Blayney Mike <Mike.Blayney@fhs.fhscu.nhs.uk>
To: alextech <alextech@life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: On belief systems and learning

I am fairly new to AT so it is with some trepidation that I dip my toe into the water's of this forum. I have only been having lessons for about 3 months but have read an amount of the AT related literature including David Gorman's Web articles which I found deeply perceptive and intellectually stimulating, particularly the way we humans get trapped into 'bad' habit forming cycles (in all sorts of areas - not just AT related, whatever that is). I have been following this thread with interest but each new

email re-awakens the same nagging question in me. I've probably missed something quite obvious but nevertheless here it is:

The violinist tightens up (or whatever) when she tries to play well. She usually tries to play well when 'it matters', supposedly to a perceived critical audience. The answer to her problem is to stop 'trying to play well'. Fine, this I can appreciate. Her thought (belief system?) that she must 'try and play well' is now inextricably linked to her 'problem' (although I wonder whether her belief system based in 'trying to play well' was historically instrumental in her playing well? - but I digress). I suppose we all have occasions where we tighten or freeze when in front of an audience and thinking 'I won't try' can help - as can other techniques e.g. thinking of everyone in the audience as your friend instead of a potential critic.

But what about the person who has slouched around for countless years, rounded shoulders, head bent, back over-arched, hips forward and is now in trouble with pain in the neck and lower back. His set of 'habits' are inter-related and ingrained over many years. We are told it is no good telling a man to stand with correct posture who doesn't have a clue as to what a correct posture is. Should we tell him, like the violinist, to 'stop trying to stand up straight' and expect his problems to disappear (sorry that's a bit flippant, but point made I hope). Surely the difference here is mainly in the increased complexity of the 'problems' and belief systems in play. With the violinist there is a well perceived step that can be taken to change her belief system but the sloucher is so far removed from a belief system that is going to help him that he needs a series of stepping stones. What are these stepping stones? How is he to get from where he is now to where he wants to be (whatever that is) It is like the alcoholic who is told to stop drinking - he doesn't have a clue about how to achieve this. He needs a path to get to sobriety because his belief systems are so very far removed from a sober point of view.

I wonder if I ought to send this? Oh well, might as well,
Michael, Devon, England

Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998
To: Mike.Blayney@fhs.fhscu.nhs.uk,
alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
Subject: Re: On belief systems and learning

Hello list: and Mike

Wonderful post! One thing that comes to mind is that "playing well," represents an end to be gained. The problem David addresses is that the violinist's response to the stimulus of that 'end' has been (or become) an unhelpful one. In order to achieve her goal she must first stop pursuing it along old lines. e.g. "Trying the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

Dewey's sloucher is in the same position. Unlike the violinist, he has NO success with his attempts to 'stand straight,' and has little impetus to continue trying. Still, both individuals need to cease 'trying' as the initial step. The violinist is probably capable of 'playing well' once she ceases the extra effort involved in acting on her IDEA of playing well. The sloucher will need to go on to new

experiences of what 'standing' does and does not mean, before he can know what kind of effort is really needed.

John Coffin

Date: Thu, 2 Jul 1998 15:02:17 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: reply to Mike Blayney and John Coffin

Hi again everyone,

I'm not getting much works done with all this action on the forum as the postings come thick and fast... But here goes...

Mike Blayney writes on July 1, 1998

"The answer to her problem [the violinist] is to stop 'trying to play well'. Fine, this I can appreciate. Her thought (belief system?) that she must 'try and play well' is now inextricably linked to her 'problem' (although I wonder whether her belief system based in 'trying to play well' was historically instrumental in her playing well? - but I digress). I suppose we all have occasions where we tighten or freeze when in front of an audience and thinking 'I won't try' can help"

I'm not sure what you mean by "her thought (belief system?) that she must 'try and play well' is now inextricably linked to her 'problem'".

To me it is because she has come to this belief system through her past experiences (teachers, colleagues, feelings, whatever) that she now reacts to the situation she considers important by what she calls 'trying to play well'. As she discovered in our experiment, this 'trying to play well' not only does NOT help her play well (quite the contrary), but the very trying to control her playing (the concentrating, the extra effort with her fingers and the bow) IS the tension and pain she feels. And she is only 'doing' this trying to control BECAUSE she still believes it will help her and she HAS to do it.

The answer to her problem is NOT to stop trying to play well. This was only the experiment we made so that she can directly perceive that her 'playing well' is NOT WHAT SHE THOUGHT IT WAS--in fact it is the opposite. This is not a TECHNIQUE to 'cope' with her problem, or a something to 'do' when the problem is there. It is a LEARNING experiment so that she can really take in that she was DELUDED (misconceiving) and so that she can really take in how things do actually work.

This may not sink in for her right away with the first experiment but it doesn't take all that many. The 'reality' construct cannot keep up its 'realityness' when confronted with opposing experiences time after time.

If she did find herself in concert getting caught again in her trying to play well, it would be because she has not yet learned this. But, here is her chance to see it again, for she has the 'symptom' to remind her that she is indeed trying to play well (read: play better than she can at that moment)--and what that symptom is showing her is that doing so IS A STRAIN and that this is not a playing better, (And it is a strain for the very simple reason that you can't do it--the world does not work that way!)

She then has the choice (if she remembers and if she chooses) to make the learning experiment again--to know

what she wants but make no effort to do it, and to accept the consequences whatever they may be. IF, the consequences are that her tension again goes away and she enjoys herself and her playing is better, as it was before, then she has had another opportunity to really learn how things do work. In my experience it doesn't take someone more than 5-10 times of really being present for these experiments to have changed their construct, and hence themselves.

Once her construct changes and she is no longer trying to play well, just is playing as well as she can, she will discover how much better (or worse) that does make her playing. That is, she will have answered FOR HERSELF your question about whether 'trying to play well' was historically instrumental in her playing well.

"But what about the person who has slouched around for countless years, rounded shoulders, head bent, back over-arched, hips forward and is now in trouble with pain in the neck and lower back... ...Should we tell him, like the violinist, to 'stop trying to stand up straight' and expect his problems to disappear... ...Surely the difference here is mainly in the increased complexity of the 'problems' and belief systems in play."

The belief system 'in play' for anyone will always be complex because it is the person's whole 'reality'. Hopefully from the above clarification of the violinist, you can see that it makes no sense to tell someone to stop trying to stand up straight. It certainly would be odd if someone expected their problems to disappear if they did so.

This is because in the example of the person who is slouching, he doesn't even know what the problem really IS... yet. It seems that HE THINKS it is the slouching and that this is what is giving him the pain in the neck and back. This is why it would make sense for him to try to correct the 'problem' by standing up straight. The fact that this doesn't work is a clue that his 'slouching' is not the problem at all, merely the organization or physical/functional coordination of whatever it is that he is up to (belief systems, thoughts, feelings, actions and all).

For such a person, the only step that makes sense is to go right back to finding out what he is up to in his life. The simplest way to do this is to find out what are his problems--the messages that have come to him as he perceives them. These are the 'problems' other than his 'slouching', since 'he' is not doing that, it is simply the inevitable and 'natural' physical/functional organization of his constructs. Natural in the sense that it is just what happens to him and has been happening to him for a while.

We can't go anywhere deeper here with this example because it is all hypothetical and therefore there is no real person with real feelings and thoughts and history to work with. But if we had an actual person who really did want to change, that is where I'd go--to bring out whatever may be his concurrent 'problems', which of course are all part of his life and are inseparable from his 'postural' way of living that life.

To give you an idea of the kind of things that I mean by concurrent problems in a 'sloucher', I'll use an example from my experience of the kinds of 'problems' that are also going on (these are from the person's point of view,

remember)--a low sense of value, constant judgement of oneself, trying hard to please, and so on.

As these come out and are explored and worked out in practice, and the person sees how they reinforced their low sense of value by imagining what other people thought of them (for instance), or sees that their judgement of themselves was to a much higher standard than their judgement of others, and as the person makes the experiments (for instance) to recognize what actually is happening at the moment of their imagining, they will deeply change. As they change, their physical/functional coordinations are no longer the coordinations of the old person, but of the new person.

Over time, as the person changes, their physical/functional coordination (their 'use' in the Alexander sense of the word), simply changes by itself. The person usually doesn't even know it has changed until one day they notice that they are not at all like they use to be. A person (to use my example) who is not constantly down on themselves will be more up and happy and secure and strong and this will naturally be reflected in their whole carriage and speech and manner.

This gives us a new light on what John C. wrote on July 1, 1998:

"The sloucher will need to go on to new experiences of what 'standing' does and does not mean, before he can know what kind of effort is really needed."

From my point of view, if the real issue has nothing at all to do with slouching or standing, there is no point in bringing someone to more awareness of their standing, in giving experiences of better standing, or how much effort is needed or anything like that. After all, what the person (or an outsider) is seeing as slouching in standing is not just in their standing but in everything they do, because it is the organization of being them. The more anyone might draw someone to 're-educating' standing, the more they'd be forgetting that when someone is strong and happy (again to use the 'problems' of my example--there are others, of course), they are paying no attention to standing.

Standing, movement, posture, etc. are NOT something we have to learn, they are manifestations of who we are in our lives (our lived constructs). Change that and ALL the manifestations change in an integrated way.

warmly,
David

Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998 16:24:52 +0000
To: <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
From: kirk@mcelhearn.com (Kirk Mcelhearn)
Subject: Re: David's Teaching Technique

(I sent some comments directly to David on his article, which I find enlightening. I thought I would through just a brief comment out to the list, however, to see what others think of it. Note: I am not a teacher of the AT, but took lessons about 10 years ago, and have just started taking them again.)

It is and should be obvious to anyone that pulling the head back etc. are symptoms, and not causes in themselves. I had always thought that this was how Alexander considered it. I think what you are suggesting is quite interesting, but let me go one step further: you are

advocating non-doing, letting things happen, and I definitely feel deeply that you are on the right track. But, let me ask you a question: if this is why we pull our heads back (to use your terminology), or why we play poorly, or miss the ball, is it the cause or the symptom? Suppose it were only another layer of symptom. Suppose the cause were still deeper.....

Kirk

Date: Thu, 2 Jul 1998 15:01:59 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: reply to Kirk McElhearn

Thanks Kirk, for your long private post, I'll respond in due course to you...

This reply is on Kirk McElhearn's public question of July 1st, 1998:

"you are advocating non-doing, letting things happen, and I definitely feel deeply that you are on the right track. But, let me ask you a question: if this is why we pull our heads back (to use your terminology), or why we play poorly, or miss the ball, is it the cause or the symptom? Suppose it were only another layer of symptom. Suppose the cause were still deeper..."

If the symptom is what the person notices--the 'low-value' repeated experience of tension, pain, anxiety, fear, etc., then we are asking, "symptom of what?" If we find that what the person is up to is 'trying to play well' (with the emphasis on the trying) when they have their symptom of tension, or 'imagining that people are judging them unfavourably' (with the emphasis on imagining) when they have their symptom of nervousness or anxiety, then it is hard to escape that what is happening to the person (the tension, the anxiety) is the experience of being up to what they are up to (TRYING to play well, or IMAGINING people's thoughts).

If we also see that the person has a belief system that says that this concert is important and I have to play well and I can do something to play well, they WILL try to do something to play well. If the person has a belief system that something is wrong with them and they are shy and other people are actually noticing their deficits and are judging them as lacking, then they will feel anxious whenever they get into that.

If we then invite them to not try to concentrate on playing well, but to simply play as they can, no matter how bad it may be, and if their tension then disappears and they play better and they enjoy themselves, then how can we escape that this ACTION of trying to play well (based on that misconception that it helps) is the CAUSE of the tension SYMPTOM, since it has just disappeared. Not only that but we must inevitably be drawn to the conclusion that the prior belief system was false--the trying DID NOT help me play well. A more accurate (more true) belief (knowledge) is that TRYING is an interference with my innate coordination and NOT TRYING helps me play well.

Or if we invite them to notice that they are imagining this judgement is in other people's thoughts, when they are the one thinking it, and with a little reality checking have them find out that the other people present were not actually thinking of them at all, let alone negatively, and if their

anxiety goes and they open up to the room in a much more easy way and begin to feel their own feelings rather than what they imagine others are feeling, and those feelings are now pretty nice in fact, then how can we escape that the imagining was the CAUSE of the anxiety SYMPTOM (experience), because it goes away when the person is recognizing their own thoughts, not mistaking them for others. It is obvious here that the prior belief system is false--people were not judging me, I was. etc. etc.

I don't how Kirk feels about this, but I don't see the need to invoke other levels than this...

warmly,
David

Date: Wed, 01 Jul 1998 12:54:34 EDT
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: tvasiliades@juno.com (THOMAS VASILIADES)
Subject: RE: epistemology, David Gorman, beliefs, etc.

I have returned from the NASTAT annual meeting and a short vacation. Sorting through all the e-mail postings I have walked in on a fascinating conversation. As a preamble of sorts I will state that the discoveries of Alexander were revolutionary. What follows is put forth to continue advancing the work that Alexander developed, to complete it (not as a finished product but as one speaker completes another in conversation). I am currently writing a paper, the working title is: A Postmodern Practice of the Alexander Technique. Some of what follows is from that paper, some is my response to the dialogue that's been going on.

As for David Langstroth posting on June 22:

"The important point for this forum is that the Alexander Technique, like most practical bodies of knowledge, is BASED ON the assumption of the existence of objective reality. It is only WITHIN this assumption that you can speak meaningfully about the technique."

I find the assumption in this statement not to hold. It seems to me that an atheist and a god-loving person can speak (create a conversation) meaningfully (whatever that means) giving expression to the (dis)belief in god. I don't assume the existence of objective reality and can speak to the issues that have been raised in this forum.

My response to the conversation on epistemology that happened around June 18 on this list is as follows:

Many years prior to Alexander's discoveries from the late 1400's on there was the emergence of "rational man" (I use man here for historical accuracy), enlightened man, modern man. Man becomes capable of understanding nature through science. Epistemology is, in short, how we know, the activity of knowing. Ontology is, the objects of knowledge, what there is to know. With modern science, "man" (the observer) whose knowledge of the world is made possible by empirical observation and mathematics, becomes the ideal knower. Distance between the observer and the observed is needed for scientific epistemology. We need that distance, for example, to observe and study the stars. Certainly over the past 500 years the discoveries and advancements created by modern science have been enormously helpful to the world. Electricity, airplanes, telephones, computers etc. . I am not taking an anti-

science position here. Science has given much to the world.

What doesn't follow is that the scientific epistemological dualistic paradigm for observing stars doesn't hold for understanding human activity. There is not the distance needed for the observation for humans observing other humans and themselves. In my opinion, holding on to epistemology has had a great impact on the failures of the social sciences and the limitations of medical science. This is not a denial of the hard work and the well-meaning people who work in these fields. It is accurate to say that we have not developed as a species, emotional and humanistically as we have technologically. This though is for another conversation.

In an Alexander lesson a teacher doesn't have the distance from the student. They are a unity that is not separable into particulars of two selves (teacher and student). The distance needed is not there.

In my teaching we(my students and I) are creating conversation. We challenge the assumptions of how they live their lives. We create an environment for us to grow, learn and develop. In the performance based approach I've been working with, we create conversation and one of the things I do is put hands on. The putting in of hands is no longer primary in teaching. In teaching there isn't anything primary, causal or explanatory. With this method I don't seek to know the causality or explanation of someone's discomfort (calling it a problem cries out for a solution) rather together we work to build with what we have to transform ourselves.

I applaud David Gorman. Thanks for your openness, and sharing your process with us. I admire you for going out on a limb.

My fundamental disagreement with what David has written, at least how I read his three part posting, is the belief in object reality. The implication of object reality is that there is truth, an absolutism. We (humans) are continually creating environments none more real or truthful than any other.

Another concept I disagree with is the concept of the 'self' (for sure David G. didn't create this concept, nor did FM. The concept has been around since the Greeks and reached greater prominence with the help of Descartes "I think therefore I am" and the Enlightenment period.) As I wrote above the teacher and student are not separable. We are interconnected. We are a social species. The concept of the self, in my opinion, separates that that is inseparable.

The performance based method I have been practicing helps to create choices(not simply be a choice maker) for students to grow and develop. As a teacher I offer the student(s) the opportunity to perform who they are(their usual performance) and who they are not(e.g., not compressed), at the same time. I don't tell them 'how' to do it in a cognitive way. It is through performed activity that we change developmentally. The mentalistic inhibition/direction self-centered approach leaves out collective performed activity. As we continue to work, students discover and are consciously aware of the activity of what we are doing together. Through this process of performance, students are more free and open to live their lives developmentally, they transform. Also, they attain

relief from chronic pain, stress relief, improved breathing and enhanced performance to name a few benefits.

I thought in some of what David G. was doing with both the young man and the violinist was asking them to perform who they are(what they are up to) and getting them to perform who they are not. My disagreement with you here, David, is that you went after the causality, the explanation of the problem. I question whether it is necessary, helpful or possible to know the cause of misuse. We can ask students to perform without the causality, the reason. I do and the results have been significant. I find that my students don't use the technique instrumentally (applying the technique to an activity) for a particular result(good use). They practice(through performed activity) the Alexander method. The activity is simultaneously tool-and-result.

I've worked with Dr. Fred Newman, a doctor of philosophy, a psychotherapist (founder of Social Therapy)for many years. From him I heard about a Soviet psychologist named Lev Vygotsky. His work was during the 1920's-30's. He died at the age of 37. Vygotsky discoveries on human development are notable. One I will share with you. Vygotsky noticed how children learned to speak. A child makes sounds (gaga, googoo). An experienced speaker (mother, father, siblings, etc.) responds to the child with "Oh, do you want the bottle?" The experienced speaker is relating to the child as a "head taller than she/he is"(these are Vygotsky's words here, no pun intended). Now who knows if the child wants the bottle, wants anything, is trying to speak or knows what speaking is. It is through the process, the activity of the child imitating, performing beyond itself, performing who it is not that it transforms, develops into a speaker. From sounds, to syllables, to words, to phrases, to sentences, to paragraphs, to conversation a child performs beyond herself/himself. The child grows and develops into a speaker. It is by performing that we(humans) develop beyond who we are, not knowledge, not causality, not explanation. A child doesn't 'know' how to speak before it learns how to speak. A child doesn't know the causality or the explanation of why she/he is or is not a speaker. She/he performs and develops into a speaker. The child learns then develops into a speaker. As Vygotsky says "learning precedes development." This is different from the Piagetian model that has it the other way.

It is through performed activity that will free the 'we' (teacher and student(s)), grow, learn, develop and improve use and function. The linearity of the mentalistic inhibition/direction approach is confining. After all the use of the self has to do with the 'self', a particular mistakenly separated from an interconnected world that is inseparable.

There's is more that I'd like to say but would like to hear your responses. I prefer any posting to be to the list instead of a private response.

Tom Vasiliades, New York City

Date: Thu, 02 Jul 1998 18:52:50 +0100

To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu

From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>

Subject: reply to Thomas Vasiliades

Dear Thomas,

Thanks for your ideas. You have raised interesting areas with postmodernism and Vygotsky but there are a couple of points which I would debate with you.

Firstly, concerning the existence of objective reality, you wrote that you didn't believe in it and didn't see this as a problem:

"It seems to me that an atheist and a god-loving person can speak (create a conversation) meaningfully (whatever that means) giving expression to the (dis)belief in god. I don't assume the existence of objective reality and can speak to the issues that have been raised in this forum."

As you say, the atheist can discuss the existence of God with the christian but the conversation that they can't have is "What is the true nature of the trinity". The christian will have his ideas, but without joining him (if only temporarily) in the fundamental assumption that God exists the atheist cannot participate in the conversation. So too with Alexander Technique. If you believe that we all construct our own personal realities then we can certainly have a debate about whether or not the Technique is real or describes anything real, but as soon as we discuss "Where is forward and up" you are entering into (perhaps only temporarily) the assumption that objective reality exists because objective reality is what the concepts of the technique assume. The only way you can have this conversation from your perspective is to argue that "forward and up" (and every other Alexander concept) does not describe any objective reality.

Let me say a few words on postmodernism. It has certainly thrown up an interesting perspective on the world in which we live and how we know what we know. I would predict however, in spite of its current fashionable status in some academic circles, that before too long it will be seen as an intellectual dead end, and we will see a re-emergence of objectively based theorising. I think it will have made an important contribution and that some of its critiques are valid, but I do not think it has a future in its extreme form.

I say this because if we are to accept the arguments of postmodernists then the projects which are left open to us are deconstruction and discourse analysis. After a time, when everything has been deconstructed and we are left endlessly analysing discourse, all that we will be able to contribute will be limited personal points of view on the semiotic systems of our society. Postmodernism cannot construct anything more than a point of view. Its usefulness is hobbled by its own position.

You also brought up Vygotsky. His ideas have been hugely influential, giving a lot of support to a newish perspective in social psychology known as social constructionism. Interestingly, Vygotsky did believe that objective reality exists as his project was to explain how objectively real children develop according to a real, and universal pattern of cause and effect concerning social processes. Ironically postmodern criticism of Vygotsky has pointed out that his particular theory is a product of his positioning in the rigid intellectual climate of the Soviet Union, in which the individual was rigorously de-emphasised in favour of the collective.

However, one important caution about Vygotsky is that he studied child development. I am not aware that he

explicitly applied his ideas to adult learning or development. If he did not, then the drawing of parallels would have to be done with some caution.

My personal problem with social constructionism is that, although it gives us a good analysis of how social processes create the person that we are, it is profoundly deterministic. What Alexander gave us was a way to escape whatever habits that have come to form us, whether those habits are based in biological drives, childhood psychic experiences, or the social processes we have experienced. Alexander offers us the way to change, and to move beyond the determining factors so assertively argued by psychoanalysis, social constructionism, or even the biological perspectives of social psychology. They have all tried to explain the ways in which our instincts or habits (based on inheritance or experience) determine us.

--Alexander showed that they don't have to.

David Langstroth

Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998

To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu

From: JohnC10303@aol.com

Subject: Re: Dewey quote and Primary Control

Peter:

In the South African trial, much was made of the loose connection between 'zentralapparat' and 'Primary Control,' the former being Magnus' term for the region of the brain stem where much/most postural/coordinating activity originated. As I recall offhand, one of Alexander's doctor pupils (I think Murdoch) said that he had translated the relevant passages for FM and that any confusion lay in the transition between languages.

Lulie Westfeldt claimed that Alexander didn't clarify the primacy of neck/head in MSI. This is not true, the do it yourself instructions for sitting, standing, walking give the 'orders' in sequence.

I am not sure how much the earlier terms; 'antagonistic action,' 'primary movement,' 'position of mechanical advantage,' principle of mechanical advantage' are intended to include the neck and head. MSI and CCCI are pretty cagey about giving 'laundry lists' of orders. Alexander refers to 'primary' (inhibitory) and 'secondary' (volitional) orders, but disclaims any universal series. I suspect that the concept we now call 'primary control' may have been rattling around for a while before Magnus' papers provided a working name for it.

Another reason I alluded to the absence of Primary Control references in Dewey is that Gorman's new Revelation seems to echo Dewey's description of Alexander's teaching before 1920.

John Coffin

Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998

To: alextech@compuserve.com,

alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

From: JohnC10303@aol.com

Subject: Re: Reply to Reply to John Coffin

Hello list: and David

Just a couple of notes.

1. I agree absolutely about the problem of the Alexander Technique as practiced versus the Technique as it might/should be defined. Alexander's books do not, and I believe were not intended to provide some Platonic Ideal of what the Technique was, is, and ever shall be. The gap between the Technique AS DESCRIBED and the Technique AS PRACTICED is still pretty shocking. As a class, teachers of the Technique seem wildly over concerned with the 'physical' at the expense of the 'psychical.' The use of terms like 'body work,' 'practitioner,' and even (so help me) 'therapy,' indicate a massive exodus away from the implications of the Technique as passed down to us. I alluded to the prevalence of of 'unteachability' among teachers in reference to this, and also to answer David's statement about not having heard about the matters he is now concerned with from X number of visiting teachers at his training course.

2. You seem to be laboring under a misunderstanding of the nature of proof. When I say that your success with your current practice does not justify claiming new discoveries, I am making a simple statement of fact. I am not attempting an evaluation of either the success or the theories claimed to explain it. 'Clinical' observation, from the standpoint of 'giver' or 'receiver,' is so notoriously untrustworthy that it should not need rementioning. Lobotomists, bleeders and purgers, psychotherapists 'curing' homosexuality etc. all had no trouble 'confirming thier theories in clinical experience;' and their unfortunate patients were just as likely to be satisfied with the treatment received. Shaw wrote: 'The first duty of the doctor is to agree with the patients diagnosis.'

3. 'Ad hominem attacks.' Prejudice and sectarianism in the Technique has been fostered by the reluctance of older teachers to talk openly about the divisions that inevitably ocured after Alexander's death. Claims of primary authority, the trouble with Charles Neal and the 'Isobel Cripps Centre,' the attempt of Beaumont Alexander to control the Technique, the Barlow's unapproved training course; all were dirty secrets during my training. Instead of open discussion, we had vague gossip and disparaging remarks about teaching ability. Our collective inability to recognize and deal with the CAUSES of these entirely understandable clashes has probably set the Technique's progress back by decades.

If ad hominem attacks are the problem, how are we to take the implication that David Gorman has discovered that we have all been wasting our time for the last 104 years and that he alone has received a 'new revelation' which renders the Alexander Technique obsolete? This 'homo' feels pretty well attacked!

Back to the real matter:

David Gorman has written a powerful argument in favor of reconsidering much of what is now called the 'Alexander Technique,' in particular the overemphasis on muscle which makes the Technique look like a postural method.

David also has pointed out the problem of a sort of medieval scholasticism growing around the Authority of Alexander and a few of the first generation teachers. In response to this problem he has established a new orthodoxy with himself as its leader and Source of Authority. David claims to be training teachers who will be impervious to imitation and ritual, it will be for time to

demonstrate how this can happen if One Person is in the position of source and judge of 'independant thinking and experiment.'

Love and service

John Coffin

Date: Thu, 2 Jul 1998 12:03:30 +0000
From: kirk@mcelhearn.com (Kirk Mcelhearn)
To: <JohnC10303@aol.com>,
<alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Re: Reply to Reply to John Coffin

On 1/07/98, John Coffin is reported to have said:

"David also has pointed out the problem of a sort of medieval scholasticism growing around the Authority of Alexander and a few of the first generation teachers. In response to this problem he has established a new orthodoxy with himself as its leader and Source of Authority. David claims to be training teachers who will be impervious to imitation and ritual, it will be for time to demonstrate how this can happen if One Person is in the position of source and judge of 'independant thinking and experiment."

Gee, isn't that how Alexandre did it?.....

Kirk

Date: Thu, 2 Jul 1998
To: kirk@mcelhearn.com, alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
Subject: Re: Reply to Reply to John Coffin

list and Kirk

"Gee, isn't that how Alexandre did it?....."

Of course it is. Despite his efforts to the contrary, Alexander could not avoid being shunted into the position of Ideal Example. We are still suffering from our attempts to duplicate or depose him instead of learning from him.

John Coffin

Date: Thu, 2 Jul 1998
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: David Gorman -- experiences in lessons

Dear David, and all,

In a message, dated 01/07/98, you wrote:

"But the real point for this discussion is that there is also NO POSSIBILITY of a real debate even on the issue of the validity of the premises of the Alexander Technique in the light of my challenge, until whoever wants to debate has done the experiments for themselves of correlating people's actual thoughts/feelings/actions, AS EXPERIENCED BY THOSE PEOPLE, with the physical/functional coordinations AS SEEN BY ANY OUTSIDER.

If any of you feel that you have already done that, then please bring forward what you have found and how it relates to what makes sense to do to help someone. AND how you feel this relates to the 'Alexander Technique' as it

usually practiced. Some of you are doing that and as David Langstroth says in his recent post, then we can debate the interpretations."

Let's see whether a lesson which I gave today could perhaps serve as a contribution to David's proposal. Please consider that it is only one example, other lessons which I give could go quite different. It is also only a partial description, so please realize that the actual lesson was a little slower than the description might suggest.

At the beginning I asked my student what she would like to do today. She wished to see what she was doing while ironing. She also reported pain between the shoulder blades after having done that for a while in her usual way and she could imagine, but actually not believe that "ironing and not having pain" could go together.

So we got an iron board and off she went. What she did, among other things, was that she raised her shoulder and elbow and sort of shoved the iron over the board, chiefly through rotating her whole shoulder girdle and shifting her weight from one foot to the other. There was an almost complete absence of rotation in the glenohumeral joint. The pain became noticeable to her.

Since she already knows where the joints are in the shoulder region, I asked her what movements she could make in the shoulder joint, and she demonstrated very easily ad/abduction and flexion/extension. I asked her if she could think of a third degree of freedom in the shoulder joint. She thought about it for a while and then she said "no, but I remember vaguely that there should be one."

I then asked her to demonstrate to me what she would do in order to turn a key with the arm downward, elbow extended. She invariably responded by raising her shoulder girdle and rotating it inward. I asked her where this movement happened and she very accurately described to me what I had just seen. I asked her how efficient she thought her movement was. Because of her already existing knowledge she could see easily that the movement she made was neither effective enough nor appropriate for turning the arm sufficiently.

Then I asked her if she was interested in experiencing how the shoulder joint is actually made to move. When she said yes, I rotated her shoulder joint according to my knowledge of its structure and according to my knowledge of what one could call "the manipulative side" of the technique.

It came as little surprise to me that she wanted to help me by doing the things she thought she HAD TO DO in order to rotate the arm. When I asked her if she could make a decision not to use the movements that admittedly did not make sense to her anymore, the rotational movement of the arm went practically without friction.

I was just about to ask her if this movement was the same or different from the one she had just done before, but she pre-empted me by saying, "it's as if the arm isn't there anymore." Then, after a while, she said, "it is as if I do the unnecessary things with my muscles to be sure that the arm is really there."

I said, "yes, that's what it means to you. And you are the lucky one who decides whether to move in the more effective way and feel strange, or to move in the way that doesn't make sense to you by now, and feel familiar. So,

let's see if you can rotate your arm at the shoulder joint by yourself." And she did it with that gorgeous simplicity which is so characteristic of efficient movement.

"Now," I asked, "do you think you could bring your forearm up, with the palm down, but continue to think what you've thought before, and decide to rotate the shoulder joint in the new and more effective way?" She said, "yes". And she did. And she almost couldn't stop being amazed how little effort was necessary to make this comparatively large movement with her hand.

Then I said, "as you and I know, there are more than one joint involved in moving the hand across a straight line, as for instance, in ironing. BUT: do you think you could continue the kind of thinking process you've done before and move your hand with the iron in it, while allowing your shoulder joint to work in the more easy way, the way for which it is actually designed?" She said, "yes," and she succeeded after the second attempt.

I asked her about the pain she had referred earlier. She asked "what pain?" and the moment later we were both laughing. She even had forgotten the pain that she thought was inseparably bound with the activity of ironing. And that, in effect, was the end of the lesson.

This was not the first example of a particular movement limitation that students impose on themselves according to their IDEAS of what is true and what is not true, but it is but an example in which the student reported afterwards that she was more clear than usual that SHE HERSELF (more than anyone else) was doing the process that helped her -- that is, the process of finding out 1) what her idea of the activity was, 2) which idea could work better in reality and 3) how to make a constructive change in her thinking in order to accomplish the task at hand with NO MORE than the necessary muscular effort, and instead more in accordance with the way the structure of the body is organized.

The hands-on part in that lesson went for about 30 seconds.

In another circumstance, I might have chosen an entirely different approach (in connection with perhaps more or actually no hands-on work).

What I do in a lesson is dependent upon the conditions present and upon what the student and I can recognize as the conception (belief, belief system) underlying the thinking underlying the movement (which might or might not actually cause a problem).

What I do in a lesson also depends on my decision to interact -- to the best of my knowledge and abilities -- with my students in such a way that it "appeals to their reasoning faculties and latent powers of originality," so that students have the chance to become increasingly able to use their faculties and powers in order to accomplish a constructive change in the way in which they direct the use of themselves in their activities.

Is this the way Alexander gave lessons? According to his students, at least those of the period between the 30's and 50's, it doesn't seem so.

Is this the way FM trained his students to become teachers? According to the several records, diaries etc., it looks like he did it not that way, at least in his Training Course. What FM really "was up to", what his issue really was is the thing that we can, as always, only guess.

But remember that Ethel Webb, according to Walter Carrington, often told that when she asked Mr. Alexander for advice on how to teach, he told her, "Just don't do anything you have ever seen me do." She also added that this advice "was my training."

Is this way of teaching consistent with Mr. Alexander's principles as stated in his writings? I think it depends chiefly on four things:

- 1) a relentless work on understanding Mr Alexander's principles from his own writings;
- 2) the degree to which I can reasonably prove that the procedures (or "technical evolutions", if you prefer FM's phrase) that I use are consistent with the principles of FM's work (of course, as I understand them at any particular moment);
- 3) a constant process of reasoning out what the most appropriate way of doing any activity, including teaching, would consist of; and
- 4) the willingness to change my assumptions in the light of new facts, should I find that the new facts prove that the basic premises on which I built my assumptions are wrong.

Is this a valuable contribution to the list? Please tell me, because if nobody wants to read it there would be no sense for me in further writing mails like this.

Peter Ruhrberg

Date: Fri, 3 Jul 1998

To: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>, alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: Rajal Cohen <rajcohen@usa.net>
Subject: Re: David Gorman -- experiences in lessons

At 05:56 PM 7/2/98 +0200, Peter Ruhrberg wrote:
"Let's see whether a lesson which I gave today could perhaps serve as a contribution to David's proposal. Is this a valuable contribution to the list? Please tell me, because if nobody wants to read it there would be no sense for me in further writing mails like this."

Peter,

All the theoretical issues are getting a little beyond me, but I very much appreciate being talked through how you taught a specific lesson. It was very generous of you to share what you actually did in an actual lesson.

I think we all tend to be a bit shy about doing that, opening ourselves up to potential criticism for other list-readers who have a different take on how the AT really SHOULD be taught. Or we guard our special tricks and ways of teaching so we can be special. We hide behind abstractions and deprive each other of useful information.

I hope others will follow your lead. (I hope I will.) Thanks.
Rajal Cohen

Date: Fri, 3 Jul 1998 01:42:27 EDT

To: alextech@compuserve.com, alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
Subject: Re: reply to Mike Blayney and John Coffin
List: and David

Apparently D.G. is unable to digest my opinions even I am supporting him. I have attempted to link Gorman's example of the futility of the violinist 'trying to play well' with Dewey's example of the subject 'trying to stand straight.' The chief difference being that the violinist is 'trying,' in an unhelpful way, to do something which she CAN do; while the Sloucher can only blindly try to do something he would already be doing if he could.

I expressed the difference like this:

"The sloucher will need to go on to new experiences of what 'standing' does and does not mean, before he can know what kind of effort is really needed."

Gorman replied like this:

"From my point of view, if the real issue has nothing at all to do with slouching or standing, there is no point in bringing someone to more awareness of their standing, in giving experiences of better standing, or how much effort is needed or anything like that. After all, what the person (or an outsider) is seeing as slouching in standing is not just in their standing but in everything they do, because it is the organization of being them. The more anyone might draw someone to 're-educating' standing, the more they'd be forgetting that when someone is strong and happy (again to use the 'problems' of my example--there are others, of course), they are paying no attention to standing."

If we follow this reasoning, the following should be true of the violinist: After all, what the person (or an outsider) is seeing as strain in violin playing is not just in their violin playing but in everything they do, because it is the organization of being them. ... when someone is strong and happy ... they are paying no attention to playing the violin.

Further along he says:

"Standing, movement, posture, etc. are NOT something we have to learn, they are manifestations of who we are in our lives (our lived constructs)."

Oh please! If standing etc. etc. are 'manifestations of ... our lived constructs' where do we acquire these 'lived constructs' if we have not learned them? The statement above is circular. Again; is violin playing 'NOT something we have to learn' but a 'manifestation of who we are in our lives?'

In my post I was AGREEING with Gorman on the importance of the pupils ideas (manifestations of who they are in their lives, conceptions) in the solutions of both examples. The most important step for each individual is to cease exerting effort along the lines of their previous conceptions, of 'playing well' or 'standing straight.' Feeling 'strong and happy' is a by-product of ceasing to beat one's head against a wall, putting your efforts where they are of real use and enjoying the resultant success.

Love and Service
John Coffin

Date: Fri, 3 Jul 1998

From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: reply to Mike Blayney and John Coffin
Hi all,

John Coffin wrote on July 3, 1998:

"Apparently D.G. is unable to digest my opinions even I am supporting him."

I'm sorry if John feels that I cannot even agree with him. I always appreciate support, but, as far as I can see, we are in fact talking about quite different things.

The cases of the violinist and the sloucher are very different and if you tried to compare them the way John is you'd miss that difference.

In my reply to Mike Blayney I made the point that in each case I am looking for what the person is up to. The violinist was up to trying to play well. She has obviously learned to play the violin, this is not an innate coordination taken care of by our system. What she has not learned is that no matter how well she wants to play, there is not much she can do to DIRECTLY achieve that goal. She can (and did) learn that the best way to achieve her goal is to stay out of the way and recognize that she plays better when she is not trying to directly play better (and, incidentally, that the critics have their own minds and will think whatever they want without her manipulating their opinions, or at least what she thinks she can do to make them like her better).

But the sloucher is a very situation and this difference is essential to understand. The sloucher, or at least most slouchers I've ever known (myself included years ago), do not set about to learn slouching. We just go about our lives doing, thinking and feeling what we do, think and feel. It so happens that 'slouching' is the physical/functional manifestation of that way of being. Eventually I or others will notice it and comment on it and then maybe I will attempt to 'correct' it (the slouching). I would be mistaken, of course, because I didn't do the slouching in the first place, but here I am attempting to correct it.

So far, perhaps John and I are in agreement. PERHAPS where we diverge is in the next step.

What the sloucher doesn't know when regarding his slouching as a 'problem' is that it is the manifestation (or the coordination if you like) of his on-going way of being--his thoughts, feelings and belief systems. When we find out what these are and uncover the delusions, misconceptions and his resulting actions and reaction upon these 'faulty reality appreciations', then we can make experiments to show clearly how things actually are (see my examples yesterday about low value and imagining judgement).

As this person learns and is no longer suffering under their misconceived 'reality' (and they will be suffering a lot), so too do the 'postural' manifestations change all by themselves. In this sense someone does not have to 'learn' at all about standing, or have better experiences of standing. We do have to get at the root of the problem--which is the faulty reality construct.

This is my point of view...

warmly,
David

Date: Fri, 3 Jul 1998

To: alextech@compuserve.com, alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com

Subject: Re: reply to Mike Blayney and John Coffin

Hello list; and David

We're getting closer. Here's a visual aid:

Playing well is to the violinist as Standing 'correctly' is to the sloucher.

This is the comparison I was making. NOT:

the violinist's tension/discomfort = the sloucher's 'bad posture.'

Each individual is acting on an incorrect conception in attempting to fulfill a perceived need.

Dewey's original example discusses this rather well: "Conditions have been formed for producing a bad result, and the bad result will occur as long as the bad conditions exist . . . It is as reasonable to expect a fire to go out when it is ordered to stop burning as to suppose that a man can stand straight in consequence of a direct action of thought and desire. The fire can be put out only by changing objective conditions; it is the same with rectification of bad posture."

The 'conditions ... for producing a bad result' are the sloucher's "on-going way of being--his thoughts, feelings and belief system.' It is these conditions (ways of being etc.) which much change in order for him to INDIRECTLY rectify his 'bad posture.'

Thus far the violinist and the sloucher are in the same boat. However I think the sloucher's trouble involves another aspect. As David writes:

"She [the violinist] can (and did) learn that the best way to achieve her goal is to stay out of the way and recognize that she plays better when she is not trying to directly play better"

It is almost certainly true that the sloucher's 'bad posture' is better than the temporary attitudes he imposes on himself in the attempt to improve. The process of unlearning his defective conception (way of being ... thoughts ... belief system) will involve not only ceasing to act on his old conceptions; but learning better conceptions IN THE PROCESS. If the sloucher refrains from acting on his old conception, he must in the process have an unfamiliar experience. This new/old experience (whether or not the teacher's hands are involved) is a direct insight into possibilities which were outside his previous repertoire of possibility.

In either case the teacher's job is not to 'improve' posture or fiddle-playing. The violinist already possessed a range of experience which included all she needed to know in order to 'play well,' the sloucher lacks that experience in his (less conscious) activity in the act of standing. The re-educational process is still essentially the same for both in that new(ish) experiences are achieved in the process.

John Coffin

Date: Fri, 4 Jul 1998, 12:04am

From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>

To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

Subject: Re: reply to Mike Blayney and John Coffin

JohnCoffin wrote on July 3rd, 1998:

"In either case the teacher's job is not to 'improve' posture or fiddle-playing. The violinist already possessed a range of experience which included all she needed to know in order to 'play well,' the sloucher lacks that experience in his (less conscious) activity in the act of standing. The re-

educational process is still essentially the same for both in that new(ish) experiences are achieved in the process."

John,

In order to compare notes and processes, I would be curious as to what specifically the re-educational process for the 'sloucher' would consist of in practice? Could you give a rough idea of the kind of process or way of approach you would use?

This would help me to see what you mean and if we are close or far...

warmly,
David

Date: Thu, 2 Jul 1998 05:25:02 -0400
From: Ann Penistan <Egil_Annie@compuserve.com>
Subject: replies to replies on Mr. Gorman's article
To: alex forum <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>

Hello Alextech Forum,

John Coffin writes:

"Well here's a how-d'ye-do. If we question Mr. Gorman's claims of originality for his new work, we are "interpreting them in the only way (w)e can, which is from (our) own background and experiences." and must attend a weeklong workshop. What does this say about those who ACCEPT his claims? I catch a whiff of 'heads I win, tails you lose' in this thread."

Please tell me what this does say about "those" who ACCEPT his claims. "Those" people who are accepting his claims, are they doing so after finding out on their own or simply without doing any research at all? Do you know any of these people and have you actually discussed or even exchanged work with these people before you are so quick to judge them?

In the third part of his article David stated: and the capital's are mine except for the word IS.

"Of course, I don't expect all these words to necessarily convince anyone. Words cannot do that. You'd need to come and see for yourself again and again what happens. OR BETTER STILL, open your eyes from this new point of view in YOUR WORK and see what happens when you find out what the person IS actually up to..."

David has quite explicitly expressed his desire for individuals to find out on their own, if they are curious. He has even stated a couple of possibilities of how to do this:

1. An INVITATION to come to a workshop, or a statement that it would make sense to come, not a "MUST". Simply an emphasis on the fact that it helps enormously to be a participant of a lesson in order to get personal experience and understanding of this work.

Is this so remarkable? Would you be so willing to discuss the merits and faults of Alexander's works with someone who has only read a bit about it and is convinced in their conclusions?

2. OR, to make the experiments ON ONE'S OWN, and he has so generously supplied the means-whereby one can start to do this. Of course, if we simply don't do what we always do when teaching then maybe something new will occur!? What does it actually mean to take that step and throw yourself into the unknown while teaching, in such a

way that you have no idea what will happen next; in such a way that you allow yourself that next moment of not knowing, and the next one..... And the next one..... And live that to see what happens to your teaching and to the learning for both you and that person you are living your experiment with. Experiences, many experiences over and over again bring knowledge.

John Wynhausen writes:

"But what is beautiful about AT is that for us retards, for whom energy directs thought, we can have the experience in our bodies first and later come back and start learning how to think."

Earlier he says:

"That key, the beliefs of the student, I would agree are a vital piece of the teaching/learning equation."

Many differing viewpoints that the Alexander Teaching world puts out create many different experiences. It is rare to ask the student what he or she is doing. It is rare to ask the student to draw from the experiences in their own lives.

Our lives are ripe with information about how we work.

By receiving a physical change, brought about by someone else's skill, we receive some contrasting information about where we were. However the opportunity to find out how you got to the uncomfortable place to begin with no longer exists. Eventually you find yourself back at this uncomfortable place and you learned to get rid of it by someone else's ability--not yours.

So where is your freedom to choose in this uncomfortable moment? Someone else, or your own efficiency at directing, is the only tool you have to get out of this uncomfortable place. This is not inhibition. Inhibiting reaction to the uncomfortable place, and living in that moment, without trying to change it, is your opportunity to find out FOR YOURSELF why you keep coming back to this uncomfortable place. You are then not trying to gain awareness through your body or trying to think yourself through something. You are just you, living and experiencing that moment. What then happens when you are truly not interfering in any way and truly making the choice to not do what you always do when faced with this uncomfortable place? That is yours to find out.

If we inhibit our usual reaction, which can sometimes be to direct ourselves, then we actually begin to see how we are operating in relationship to the world around us. This experience is not present so we can fit our ideas into it, rather a chance to seek the truth of the situation. A chance to stick around long enough in the moment to see what is happening.

Millions of years of evolution have given us an extraordinary CD ROM filled with encyclopaedic information about our nature. We do not need to direct farther away from the moment. We need to stop changing ourselves, and thus the moment, in order to start living the moment with all that we already are.

There is no need to come back later and think. You are present and free when you are not trying to change things with your own ideas. You are responsive. You can not do that which you already are.

Ann Penistan

Date: Sat, 4 Jul 1998 13:50:10 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Beliefs, etc: reply to Peter Ruhrberg

I would like to add my voice to that of Rajal and thank you for taking the time to write up an account of your recent lesson and add it to the discussion. As usual, you are very articulate and clear.

Since you were responding to my invitation to correlate:
"people's actual thoughts/feelings/actions, AS EXPERIENCED BY THOSE PEOPLE, with the physical/functional coordinations AS SEEN BY ANY OUTSIDER."

and to:

"bring forward what you have found and how it relates to what makes sense to do to help someone. AND how you feel this relates to the 'Alexander Technique' as it is usually practiced."

Now, *"we can debate the interpretations."*

For us to discuss this, I can see a number of areas in the lesson where it will be helpful to clarify what were the person-with-the-problem's thoughts, feelings, or actions that she already has and that she brings to the piece of work, and which were the person-helping-them's perceptions, ideas, or proposed actions.

"She wished to see what she was doing while ironing. She also reported pain between the shoulder blades after having done that for a while in her usual way and she could imagine, but actually not believe that "ironing and not having pain" could go together."

These are all things that she sees, feels and reports.

"What she did, among other things, was that she raised her shoulder and elbow and sort of shoved the iron over the board, chiefly through rotating her whole shoulder girdle and shifting her weight from one foot to the other. There was an almost complete absence of rotation in the glenohumeral joint."

These are the things that you see from the outside. In addition, you see these things from your trained point of view. Someone trained in some other way of working (chiropractic, say, or body-mind-centering) would probably see different things. And would probably then take different actions.

"So we got an iron board and off she went.... ...The pain became noticeable to her."

After a short period of ironing, this pain signal comes to her. This is hers.

Notice, that from this point in the lesson onwards, you operate on the basis of your 'Alexander' training by drawing her attention to her use of her shoulder and arm (which is what you see). It is not what she feels--she feels a pain between her shoulder blades. Then, presumably because your 'Alexander' viewpoint has determined that her arm movements or lack of movement is where the problem is, you propose her other possibilities of arm/shoulder movement.

That is, acting on this viewpoint, you proceeded with the key-turning demonstration and YOUR movement of HER arm (according to your "knowledge of what one could call

'the manipulative side' of the technique") which gave her a new experiences of shoulder/arm functioning.

This is what Ann Penistan meant when she wrote:

"By receiving a physical change, brought about by someone else's skill, we receive some contrasting information about where we were."

Note that these were experiences she was NOT having before. From your 'Alexander' perspective, it seems to make sense to you to manipulate her arm, so that she can "experience how the shoulder joint is actually made to move" (according to YOUR current "knowledge of its structure", that is. This is not HER current knowledge--she didn't know about "third degree of freedom in the shoulder joint" before you showed her ("no, but I remember vaguely that there should be one.").

Please note that in all of this, I am simply pointing out the course that the lesson took and what that implies about the belief system behind that course of action, not making any personal judgements. I think Peter has been very clear in describing what he does and why he does it.

But note the number of 'beliefs' in here. There is an assumption that the shoulder/arm movements as you did see them WERE the problem and the reason for the pain. And there is the assumption that if she learns to move her shoulder/arm according to how it "is actually made to move", she will have solved her ironing problem. And, of course, there is the assumption that this is how the shoulder/arm is ACTUALLY "made to move."

What if her whole coordination (not just her shoulder/arm) as she normally went about ironing was a perfectly integrated coordination of what she is actually up to? We don't know what she is actually up to in this lesson because you got her involved in changing her 'manner of use' of her shoulder/arm rather than finding out what she was doing/feeling/thinking while she was ironing.

This is what Ann Penistan meant when she added (my capitals):

"By receiving a physical change, brought about by someone else's skill, we receive some contrasting information about where we were. HOWEVER THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND OUT HOW YOU GOT TO THE UNCOMFORTABLE PLACE TO BEGIN WITH NO LONGER EXISTS."

What you taught her will certainly enable her to take control of her physical system more and more as she 'learns' how her arm works, and another time in a different activity, how her legs work and another time, how her bending or breathing works, etc. And with all this learning her physical functioning will probably be a lot better.

BUT, she will not have found out IF there was something in the way SHE was going about the ironing that her system was letting her know was not constructive. By she I mean not what her arm/shoulder functioning was, but what the human being was up to. Instead she will have learned to override her 'innate' coordination in favour of a learned one.

As you said, Peter, we don't know what Alexander did or whether he would have done the lesson the same as you, but what you did certainly seems to me to be in the territory of the Alexander belief system and hence its practice.

I hope it is clear to see that it is the 'Alexander' viewpoint that would steer you off into working with her, hands-on or off, on changing the arm/shoulder functioning.

There is another possibility at that hinge point in the lesson. It is to find out what SHE was thinking feeling, doing, FROM HER POINT OF VIEW, while she is normally ironing. Sometimes (like with the violinist) the information about what someone is up to comes up right away. Other times I need to spend the lesson teaching them how to use their own symptom in the real life situation when it happens later to wake them up enough in that very moment to find out what they were then really thinking, feeling doing, reacting to, etc. It may take the time between this lesson and the next for the person to find out what they were doing, but it always does come up sooner or later.

We can't go back and redo the lesson again here in a different way, so we won't know right now, but you could try this different direction the next time or with another student. At the very least I can suggest the kind of things that do regularly come up so you can see what I mean. One of the most common in this situation is that the person does not like ironing and is trying to get it over with as soon as possible, as if they can make things go faster than they go. This belief is not true but it sure does lead to strain and tension.

Maybe they will find that they consistently 'go off' in their thinking or imagination--the physical/functional manifestation of that is usually a stiffness and 'mechanicalness'. Experiments of simply being present in each moment of her ironing will quickly show her the difference in what is happening and how she feels

In any case the purpose here is to correlate the physical/functional organization (what you see and she feels as pain) with her inner life, her attitude, her beliefs, etc. In order to actually find out what, in any correlation, there is, one needs to NOT jump in and use your 'Alexander' tools to fix things up...

If you do that the person ends up experiencing your idea of how the arm should work, on top of which she is now 'learning about' her body and how to run it (or not interfere) in a way that she didn't have to before. This is OK if your belief system says that is what has to happen to gain 'conscious constructive control', and surely this is the belief system that your pupil will have too.

However, if we have even the possibility that there is nothing that needs fixing in the organization or coordination, but rather in the whole lived construct, then we have a very different kettle of fish.

Your pupil didn't have to pay attention to her physical functioning system before, now she does. The belief system says this is necessary. If she found where and how she was misconceiving reality, she would have learned more and the physical functioning of her body would take care of it self, as it was doing before (remember, it was her wonderful system that was sending the message saying, "ouch, something you are up to is not constructive").

Hope that this helps,
warmly,
David

Date: Fri, 3 Jul 1998
To: Egil_Annie@compuserve.com,
alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
Subject: Re: replies to replies on Mr. Gorman's article
Hello list: and whoever

This gets back to epistemological fundamentals. I am not arguing that David Gorman's new vein of work is uninteresting or valueless. I am questioning whether he has any justification in founding a new sect on the basis of his current emphasis.

Gorman's three part post laid out a claim to the discovery of new principles and attempted to back it up with some anecdotes. Only after a few of us raised doubts did Gorman suggest that our unwillingness to be instantly converted represented some lack IN US. I don't know how many people responded to the original post 'positively' or how many of those concurred with the idea that the matters discussed represented a new discovery. The implication of David's response was that those who agreed with him (on the basis of testimony unsupported by demonstration) were, de facto, 'right' while those who did not agree were automatically wrong and only needed to share in the new revelation to be converted.

You write:

"Do you know any of these people and have you actually discussed or even exchanged work with these people before you are so quick to judge them?"

I must ask in return:

Do YOU know or have you exchanged work with anyone who disagrees with you? Why does your own 'quickness to judge' not register in your consciousness? And, perhaps most importantly, why in all of your wordy post do you never mention your direct involvement as one of David's chief acolytes in LearningMethods@?

David's posts have drawn attention to a serious lack in the content of 'The Alexander Technique as taught.' This is a Good Thing. I do not agree that the principles he speaks of are not discussed in Alexander's books. I would recommend reading Dewey's Introduction to Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual to anyone who is asked to evaluate claims for 'new systems' of any kind.

John Coffin

Date: Sat, 4 Jul 1998 13:51:44 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: final reply to John Coffin's argument

John Coffin wrote on July 4, 1998:

"This gets back to epistemological fundamentals. I am not arguing that David Gorman's new vein of work is uninteresting or valueless. I am questioning whether he has any justification in founding a new sect on the basis of his current emphasis."

John,

I can certainly see that you have reacted AS IF I was attacking you ("this homo certainly feels attacked" you wrote), and you are certainly taking what I write AS IF I am saying that those who agree with me are "de facto, right" and others (you seem to be including yourself) are

"automatically wrong". No wonder you are reacting! Your language ("sect", "share in the new revelation to be converted", "accolyte", etc.) shows your attitude strongly in how YOU regard my postings. You seem to have taken it all very personally ("did Gorman suggest that our unwillingness to be converted represented some lack IN US") and have leapt to the defence of yourself and Alexander, as you know him (his writings, that is).

I must say that I have not felt this attitude from anyone else in this list. If your goal is to enlighten me or persuade me of your point of view, then this is certainly not doing it. If your goal is to persuade the other members of the list to share your own feelings about me and my work, I would suggest that your way of going about things says more about you than it does about me. I do not intend to argue these points with you. Our trading messages back and forth is coming to dominate this discussion and this is not constructive.

You have a right to your opinion of me and of my work, though you have never seen it. Even if you did see it, you may still feel that whatever principles I am operating under are already amply covered in the Alexander Technique (not the Alexander Technique that is generally taught, but the one that could be if we really understood Alexander, I suppose).

Again, you are entitled to YOUR OPINION of what is and what is not the Alexander Technique. I rather doubt that we are going to have any opinion changes here merely by the use of words. So, LET US AGREE TO DISAGREE... and let go of it...

What I am now doing now in my work seems different enough TO ME from the Alexander Technique as I know it, for me to call it a different work. There are two main reasons for this:

1. the PRACTICE of what I do is so different from the AT that I felt it important to differentiate it for the sake of any students being able to be clear what they are getting (in my opinion, remember). By the way, they were the ones who urged me to call me it something else in the beginning,
2. the DEVELOPMENT of what I do is going in directions that have nothing to do with Alexander as it is normally practiced (as I know it, remember) and I wish to proceed without conflict or reaction from the Alexander community.

Therefore, I have decided in the light of all my experiences and learning to leave the Alexander world. I am not asking anyone to agree with me. Personally, I do not care if anyone does or does not. I do not have to justify to anyone starting a new work under a different name. I expect that there are those who are quite happy that I have done so... (possibly lurking on the list at this moment).

I was happy to discuss with all of you the validity of what goes on (or doesn't go on) in the Alexander Technique--I have some 25 years of experience of it, including 9 years of running a training course and 40-some trained teachers. But, it seems pointless to me to discuss the validity of my new work (or the degree of difference of my work from that of 'Alexander') as none of you have any experience at all in it and so will not be in possession of the experience of those differences.

Would you discuss the validity of the Alexander Technique with someone who came onto the list and called it names but had not had a single lesson? Would you try to

convince them in words? If you did, would you be surprised if you wouldn't get anywhere? No, you'd probably verify that the person had not had lessons and suggest that they do so before talking any further.

You might even do it as politely as that.

warmly,
David

Date: Sat, 4 Jul 1998 14:04:33 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: replies to replies etc. on Mr. Gorman's article

Dear List,

what would happen if we apply the following verse not only to whatever each and every one of us may have come to label as "the Alexander Technique", or not only to even Mr Alexander's whole work (whatever that might be), but generally -- to everything else in life -- as well?

"No matter what method of plan, system of thought, or ideas may finally be chosen as the best for dealing with man's shortcomings and difficulties in making changes, in the last analysis, success will depend upon the individual's capacity TO CARRY OUT A DECISION TO GAIN AN END BY THE CONSCIOUS EMPLOYMENT OF NEW 'MEANS-WHEREBY,' INVOLVING UNFAMILIAR PSYCHO-PHYSICAL EXPERIENCES WHICH FEEL WRONG, DISCOMFORT FREQUENTLY AMOUNTING TO IRRITATION, AND A SENSE OF UNSTEADINESS IN EQUILIBRIUM." (UCL 1946, p.105)

When we read David Gorman's article again, we perhaps will see that he did exactly that process I've emphasized in my quote.

That David Gorman decided to work in his new way AS IT MAKES SENSE TO HIM does, in my view, not necessarily mean that he really has thrown all of Mr Alexander's principles overboard, no matter how he calls his own teaching method.

I write that because I think that Mr Alexander's technique is not about any set of physical solutions, right directions or even right answers, but about a certain mental discipline, and about the process of study, learning and understanding in general. The quote above for example, as I understand it, is true for WHATEVER WE TRY TO ACCOMPLISH, including learning and teaching (and communicating with each other, for that matter).

David's decision to dissociate himself from the thing that is labeled as "Alexander Technique" in the general public is a decision which I certainly can understand. For years now I am constantly faced with a decision

1) either to call myself still an "Alexander Teacher" and be involved in an ongoing debate based on fundamental contradictions between what most people who I know understand the AT is, and my own understanding of Mr Alexander's principles;

2) or, for the sake of Mr Alexander's work, to stick to his principles as stated in his writings (as they start to make sense to me during the learning process I am doing to understand them), but not to call myself an "Alexander Teacher" anymore.

To having brought up that issue again with himself as an example is only one of the reasons why I'd like to thank David again for his article, as I did it already privately.

Best to you all,
Peter Ruhrberg, Columbusstr. 21, D-40549 Duesseldorf

Date: Sun, 5 Jul 1998 01:09:02 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
To: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: replies to replies, tec. on Mr. Gorman's...

Peter and list,

Thank you, you have put it wonderfully. Better than I did, I think. I certainly do not feel that I have thrown the baby out with the bathwater, nor "all of Mr Alexander's principles overboard, no matter how [he] calls his own teaching method"

I learned a great deal from my Alexander experiences. One of the things, among many, that I learned was to think for myself, and to let go of dogma (my own and others') when confronted with it.

Peter mentions his dilemma thus:

"David's decision to dissociate himself from the thing that is labeled as "Alexander Technique" in the general public is a decision which I certainly can understand. For years now I am constantly faced with a decision

1) either to call myself still an "Alexander Teacher" and be involved in an ongoing debate based on fundamental contradictions between what most people who I know understand the AT is, and my own understanding of Mr Alexander's principles;

2) or, for the sake of Mr Alexander's work, to stick to his principles as stated in his writings (as they start to make sense to me during the learning process I am doing to understand them), but not to call myself an "Alexander Teacher" anymore."

I know a lot of people in a similar position and I certainly was for quite a number of years until my decision was, in effect, made for me by the comments and attitudes of others.

For myself, I no longer have a dilemma as to what to do. I recognize that the majority of Alexander teachers do not think nor act the way I do (fine, no conflict, I just call what I do something else...), and while I have extreme gratitude for what I have learned from my teachers (and by extension Alexander who I never met except in his writings), I must follow my own experiences not those of others.

warmly,
David

Date: Sat, 4 Jul 1998 10:15:53 -0400
From: Alex Leith <alexl@compuserve.com>
To: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>, Alexander Technique <alextech@life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Re: David Gorman -- experiences in lessons

Peter Ruhrberg wrote:

"Is this a valuable contribution to the list?"

Yes it certainly is. I'm not a teacher, but have had AT lessons from many different teachers. It's very interesting to hear what is going on from the teacher's end.

Alex

Date: Sat, 4 Jul 1998 10:16:24 -0400
From: Alex Leith <alexl@compuserve.com>
To: Alexander Technique <alextech@life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Objective Reality

Buddhist teachers stress the importance of remaining aware of the distinction between Relative and Absolute.

In relative terms, of course objective reality exists. This keyboard is solid and makes a clicking sound. Still in relative terms, but at a rather deeper level of analysis, the world of phenomenal appearance that appears to surround the apparent observer "I", is the result of extremely complex interactions between elements in the mind stream.

In absolute terms, one has to say that objective reality neither exists nor not-exists. Likewise the apparent observer, apparently separate from the observed reality, is part of the same complex.

Of course the absolute is beyond words, so we come up against these paradoxes. We shouldn't really try to say anything at all about the absolute. Buddhist teachers do try to nudge us as close to it as possible, as a constant reminder that we ought not to be seduced into thinking (as we do all the time, or very nearly) that phenomenal reality has INHERENT real existence -- that is, existence of itself alone rather than as a product of interdependency.

One very high lama has been quoted by one of his students, a lama himself, as leaning over and saying confidentially, "Of course you know, all these things go away."

Alex

Date: Sat, 4 Jul 1998 17:13:19 EDT
To: alextech@compuserve.com, alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
Subject: Re: final exercise in futility

Hello list: and, for one last time, David

The quote you pulled at the beginning of your post still says all I need to say on the original matter of this interminable exchange: *"I am not arguing that David Gorman's new vein of work is uninteresting or valueless. I am questioning whether he has any justification in founding a new sect on the basis of his current emphasis."*

For the rest of this post I will go through last post, answering points as I go. For those following this from the sidelines, if you read the two posts in parallel you should be able to follow me.

Ah David, there is no question that your original post implied some special new discovery. I feel no personal threat from your postings. I do feel that discourse between Alexander teachers is stuck at a very low level, and that your postings have not improved things.

You stated in no uncertain terms that those who questioned you were unqualified to do so without

demonstration, while claiming (and continuing to claim) validation from the support of those who did not question you. I have received several notes from other teachers concurring with my opinions. As of yet, they have not posted to the entire list. I cannot blame them for being reluctant to expose themselves to your condescension.

You claimed that the entire community of Alexander teachers, beginning with FM, had missed the boat, and that your new discovery rendered our work redundant.

You only solicited opinions AFTER you had committed yourself to a new 'system' founded entirely on your own authority with no outside check. I have not even hazarded an opinion as to whether your purpose in this was driven by financial or personal ambition. If that does not qualify for words like 'sect,' I don't know what does.

You have taken ideas from Alexander's books, restated them in wishy-washy New Age babble and claimed them to be original with you.

You have dodged contrary argument by repeating yourself and deflected discussion away from the issues at hand by indulging in E-mail psychoanalysis.

I have expressed no opinion of your work as such in this entire exchange. Having never met you, I began this exchange with no opinion of your personality or character. I have since formed one, but it has nothing to do with the subject matter of this exchange.

For some time now, I have had to assume that you are impervious to argument. I have no hope of leading you to alter your opinions. I am concerned that others reading this list may be persuaded to agree with your self estimation.

While it is good of you to recognise the extent to which your professional activities are based on your personal opinions, why did you solicit the opinions of this list's readers if you are; "not asking anyone to agree with me." Why have you taken up so much space on this list if: "Personally, I do not care if anyone does or does not [agree]. I do not have to justify to anyone starting a new work under a different name."

I HAVE discussed the validity of the Alexander technique with the uninitiated, though not on this list. It is not difficult to justify the Technique to anyone who will listen and ask reasoned questions.

Yours in mellow holisticity
John Coffin

P.S. I will answer your questions in re 'sloucher' within a few days.

Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998 23:48:34 -0500 (CDT)
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: poised@ix.netcom.com (McCullough)
Subject: The Elegance of the Alexander Technique

Dear list,

It seems that there is a drive towards complexity from things simple and thereby elegant.

Alexander made some important discoveries for himself, among them: -that every thought produces a change within the musculature, that it is not possible to have a thought that is not expressed throughout the musculo-skeletal system. (This principle has been demonstrated over and over again, as science has developed the technology to

correlate brain activity and electrical activity within muscles.)

-that inhibition is the principle upon which the link between thought and action is based. Muscles are sent energy to fire and be activated or firing is inhibited or "turned off." Work in neuro-physiology has advanced this principle. Alexander, of course, discovered this at the practical level.

Alexander did not own the copy rights to these principles. He did, however from these principles develop his own points of view about the meaning of them: that it was useless and misleading to separate the mind from body, brain from muscles, or thought from movement. His point of view also included the idea that sensory perceptions become debauched. From these points of view, Alexander developed a pedagogy, for those who were interested, to learn how to use these principles to advance their own personal functioning.

It seems that we should be able to define Alexander's pedagogy. Obviously the hallmark of this pedagogy is the "hands-on" approach. This pedagogy does not preclude the possibility other pedagogies are possible for utilizing these principles of human functioning.

It seems the big stumbling block for many people with the Alexander work is admitting that one's sensory perceptions are debauched. It is like the alcoholic admitting s/he is an alcoholic, or the capitalist admitting to greed. To admit such a thing demands humbleness, in a sense a willingness to give up one's current self. Yet the greatest spiritual traditions make such demands. And like the greatest spiritual traditions, studying the Alexander Technique demands the development of skill. And sometimes the attainment of skill requires repetitiveness and a certain tolerance of the mundane. There are times it is difficult not to want to rebel against the day-to-day process of developing skill.

The greatest spiritual journeys also demand a certain simplicity; simplicity being the most difficult thing to maintain and its beauty being the most difficult to recognize.

When an old person gets out of the chair with the help of an Alexander teacher, with the simplicity, skill and poise of a young dance, do we really have to question so deeply the meaning the this work?

Carol McCullough, Minneapolis

Date: Fri, 03 Jul 1998 09:50:02 +0100
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: Re: The Elegance of the Alexander Technique

Dear Carol,

you wrote:

"It seems that there is a drive towards complexity from things simple and thereby elegant."

Thanks for a great reminder of the elegance and simplicity of what we are working with. In my own enthusiasm I often venture into very complex areas, arguing for the Technique in the language of science, philosophy, psychology or whatever.

This enthusiasm has come from such a positive experience of the Technique that I am going to do

something completely different from what I usually do, and just tell a simple story.

10 years ago I was just starting out in London as a professional musician (I play the double bass). At that time as far as I knew I didn't have a problem in the world. I had done several successful professional auditions, my career was taking off, I felt healthy, energetic, and I was "fit" (i.e. I did a lot of exercises). It was just chance that someone lent me Lulie Westfeldt's book on the Alexander Technique.

After reading her account I decided to have lessons, not to sort out any problems, (as far as I knew I didn't have any) but for the reason that I wanted to prevent the sorts of problems that musicians get, and if possible I wanted to be even better than I was.

Ten years later, having devoted my time and attention to developing this skill, through the patient help of a very good teacher (Tasha Miller), and having tolerated the mundane and repetitive I am staggered by the sort of changes that have accrued, and staggered at how wrong I was about thinking I didn't have any problems

My playing of the double bass has immeasurably improved. The entire range of soft and sensitive playing, as well as light and articulate playing has opened up, whereas before I used to bluster my way through with effort and bravado. I can now sing where I just used to croak, and my piano playing has changed enormously (even though I rarely practice any of these). The niggling sore shoulder resolved itself years ago (I never used to admit I had a problem with it) and my whole carriage has softened and changed. My skin has cleared up (eczema and ruddiness), my co-ordination in all activities has improved, and most impressive of all is the immeasurable changes in my emotional and mental condition. I have left behind the feeling of being driven to succeed, I feel more optimistic and peaceful and have lost the anxiety which used to well up when I was alone. And my confidence has grown enormously. The public speaking that I have had to do in the past year would have been unthinkable only a few years ago. And I certainly wouldn't have felt secure enough to contribute to a forum such as this. I used to worry too much about what everyone else would think.

That's my simple story, briefly told. I could go on at length about my personal journey but I just wanted to share with you the source of my enthusiasm.

Best Wishes,
David Langstroth, david@alexandertec.u-net.com, Cardiff, Wales

Date: Fri, 03 Jul 1998 18:09:30 +0100
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: The Intellectual Shell Game

Hello list,

Carol McCullough's excellent posting about simplicity and complexity has inspired me to contribute a short article I wrote not too long ago on a similar theme:

The Intellectual Shell Game

Have you ever seen the shell game being played? A man sits behind a table shuffling walnut shells and when he

stops another must predict under which shell the pea is to be found. Perhaps you haven't, but you're probably at least familiar with it from old films or television

It is a very simple game, or so it appears on the surface. It succeeds through the skill and sleight of hand of the operator and through the victim's faith in his ability to follow the movement of a shell without being deceived. When he fails, he is perplexed, being unable to identify the point of deception in a seamless and logically simple series of moves. But this game has probably had its day; people are aware that they can and will be tricked and that the odds are stacked against them. There is little profit to be had anymore for the operators of the shell game.

In the world of ideas, however, the game flourishes. The profits can be huge, and the victims are still unaware that there is any trickery about; are unaware in fact that they are even playing the game. It is not shells that are manipulated and shuffled by the operator, but ideas, words, arguments, concepts, statistics. And the trickery is similarly hidden in a smooth and seamless flow. This trickery, which took the form of sleight of hand in the old game, now takes many different forms. Statistics are massaged, the meanings of key words are tampered with, other positions are subtly misrepresented, related (but not necessarily compatible) arguments are introduced from other areas, digressions abound, and the whole becomes more and more complicated until the operator has baffled his victim. On his part, the victim clings to his belief that he can follow what appear to be simple movements, and then, missing the trick, he has no alternative but to say, "I see..." in a tone of voice which betrays the fact that he can't really understand how the outcome has arrived at all. The operator has won the point.

I do not intend to attack the art of argument. My point is that what often passes for honest argument in our world today is as corrupt as that game played with the walnut shells. Plato believed in argument as a method of inquiry, a way to arrive at the truth, and I believe that this is probably its most constructive role, but in the intellectual shell game argument is used to defend a fixed or preconceived idea against the truth. Winning is everything, the truth unimportant. Intellectuality becomes the servant of unconscious desires and opinions, just as skill in sleight of hand serves the lust for money in the old game.

Yet, sadly, the intellectual game is the basis for most interaction in public life, and skill at it is raised to a virtue. Observe the sparring

between skilled politicians, barristers, or between public figures and a pressing interviewer. Can you imagine at any point a politician conceding the truth of his opponent's point of view? Never. Can you imagine an employer agreeing that there was truth in his workers' reasons for asking for more pay? Rarely. They play the game to promote or defend their own interests or ideas and are only interested in bending the other to their position. And the games played at this level are no different from what takes place in pub arguments or letters to the editor.

One of the greatest indicators that the intellectual shell game is taking place is that the argument seems to be getting more and more complicated, more difficult to follow, involving more diverse variables and dependent sub-arguments. Ironically most situations can be understood in the analysis and comparison of basic

principles which can usually be expressed simply and clearly. For example, to understand the most complex and bewilderingly diverse manifestations in the universe, physicists believe that there must be one simple unified theory; DNA accounts for great biological complexity with a simple principle, and everything from sea water to plutonium obeys the simple (though sometimes strange) laws of atomic theory. This is not to say that there are no complex issues, but rather, that the simple principles lying beneath are too often not referred to either through ignorance or design. Too often it is suited to someone's hidden purpose to conduct the argument at the level of complexity rather than the level of simplicity.

Even in our universities, bright young minds are encouraged, through the activity of debating, to develop their skills at the intellectual shell game. Arbitrarily assigned opposite points of view are assumed and victory is all important, the truth of the issue being secondary. We would be better served by ways to develop skills of thinking and expressing ideas that do not at the same time run the risk of inculcating a morally bankrupt attitude towards argument and the truth. We need rather to develop an aversion to the necessity to defend fixed positions or preconceived ideas, a readiness to accept a new ideology, and a respect for the truth above and beyond our own narrow interests.

But all this requires flexibility and the ability to adapt to new conditions. The regaining of these lost attributes requires psycho-physical re-education, and continually rising standards of constructive conscious control of the individual. Without it we can only try to be more vigilant in recognising when someone is trying to play the game on us, and hope that we aren't doing the same.

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Date: Fri, 3 Jul 1998 21:23:28 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: The Intellectual Shell Game

Hello David

> The Intellectual Shell Game

Well done! This is exactly how I've felt about the issue for a long time. (Why didn't I write about it myself some 20 years ago?)

After all, what I'm aiming at is to keep simple things simple, and to build an understanding of more complex things through a succession of steps which themselves are as simple and small as possible.

By your article you helped me to get the issue of simplicity and clarity vs. trickery and hidden agendas even more clear in front of my mind's eye. While seeing it more clearly, I'm already looking forward to what I'll do with it in my thinking and my interactions.

Thank you for your article!

Peter Ruhrberg

Date: Sun, 5 Jul 1998 09:38:04 -0400
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: Rajal Cohen <rajcohen@usa.net>

Subject: Re: final exercise in futility

John, and List,

[John wrote:]

"I do feel that discourse between Alexander teachers is stuck at a very low level, and >that your postings have not improved things. ... yours in mellow holisticity"

Is that your way of bringing the level of discourse up? While I have appreciated many of your comments about David Gorman's submissions, I don't personally find large doses of sarcasm either convincing or pleasant.

"For some time now, I have had to assume that you are impervious to argument. I have no hope of leading you to alter your opinions. I am concerned that others reading this list may be persuaded to agree with your self estimation."

In my observations, most people are impervious to argument, especially when it comes in attack form.

To respond to your concern about us agreeing with DG's self-estimation: It is clear that we have here a debate between two men with keen minds, very strong opinions, and very very high opinions of themselves. (I'm not criticizing: most of my favorite people are arrogant and opinionated. . . and sometimes wrong.)

"Why have you taken up so much space on this list?"

It takes two to tango, eh? Really, though, this conversation has lit a fire under a number of us (and caused several others to unsubscribe).

Has anyone noticed how the gender balance has shifted lately? Is it because of the theoretical nature of the conversation, the high level of aggressiveness, or what, do you think?

"You stated in no uncertain terms that those who questioned you were unqualified to do so without demonstration, while claiming (and continuing to claim) validation from the support of those who did not question you."

I never heard him say his supporters didn't question him. I have questioned EVERYTHING I have ever been a strong supporter of. Haven't you?

"You claimed that the entire community of Alexander teachers, beginning with FM, had missed the boat."

I also heard that implied in David Gorman's posting. Personally, I don't mind considering the possibility! It is threatening to my AT-teacher identity/ego, but also opening and refreshing to consider, even if I later decide it is garbage. So far, I think the conversation itself has helped my teaching.

"You have taken ideas from Alexander's books, restated them in wishy-washy New Age babble and claimed them to be original with you."

I wouldn't have said it that way, but I, too, find some of his language unsatisfactorily vague.

"You have dodged contrary argument by repeating yourself"

yup.

"I HAVE discussed the validity of the Alexander technique with the uninitiated, though not on this list. It is not difficult to justify the Technique to anyone who will listen and ask reasoned questions."

I find that most people can “get” the basic concepts (we mess ourselves up, and that can be unlearned, etc.) in a conversation. I have never been able to give an adequate explanation of what happens when we put hands on, though. (I say “you become more aware of where my hand is”, but I know full well there’s more than that going on.)

I wonder, who gets to define “reasoned questions”.

Rajal Cohen, AT teacher, Virginia, USA

Date: Sun, 5 Jul 1998 11:03:30 -0400

To: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>,
Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>

From: Rajal Cohen <rajcohen@usa.net>

Subject: all this stuff

Dear David,

There was so much to respond to in your first posting, and so much in many of the responses and responses to responses, that I still feel I have not gathered my thoughts sufficiently to really respond to your post. I have lots of thoughts, questions, doubts, etc. However, I’m just going to take the time now to say some of the simple things.

I have admired your writing very much in the past. Your “In our own image” series of articles is one of the most useful things I ever read. It greatly affects my teaching. It demystifies some things that had seemed mystical and uncomprehensible until I read it. This in turn gave me much more confidence in the work, and in my ability to teach it. Your simple, logical explanation of why “sucking in the gut” doesn’t work is a small example. If you could see the look of grateful relief on the faces of women who have been guiltily trying to be a different size than they are for 20, 30 or 40 years...

Anyway, I hope you don’t disavow all your past work, and I hope you don’t shut yourself off from the Alexander “community” (such as it is).

Do you use hands-on work at all anymore?

Do you have training in counseling techniques? When you alluded to “working with symptoms” I was reminded of “Process Work” (Arny Mindell’s work).

No, really I must stop. I can’t spend all day in front of the computer.

More later...

Rajal Cohen

Date: Tue, 7 Jul 1998 02:24:40 -0400

From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>

Subject: re: all this stuff (Rajal Cohen)

Cc: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>

Rajal and list,

Thank you for your various contributions recently. I always enjoy reading your incisive and perceptive comments.

“Anyway, I hope you don’t disavow all your past work, and I hope you don’t shut yourself off from the Alexander “community” (such as it is).”

No, I don’t disavow anything. I do have plans to write a much more comprehensive book on all that territory of the “In Our Own Image” series. After all, the organization and

functioning of the human system is still what it is no matter which level we are working on.

The only change for me has been a shift in the level of where I work with people. It’s like Raymond Dart said to me when I’d given him a copy of my “Body Moveable”, “you’ve done a very thorough job, but the brain and thinking is where its at”.

And no, I don’t want to shut myself off at all from the Alexander community. As the old joke goes, “some of my best friends are Alexander teachers”. I hope too that no one will take offence at what I’ve written here (or how I may have written it) and shut me off.

“Do you use hands-on work at all anymore?”

No, not really. I can’t remember a time in the last year or so when I have put hands on. Questions are my main tool now. Most of the time a few well-placed questions are able to reveal all the information someone has about what is happening for/to them and once it is all out there on the table for them to see, the contradictions and misconceptions stick out loudly (if I can mix my metaphors).

When they do not have enough information in the lesson, I get them to go back into their daily life and use their ‘symptom’ to wake them up in those moments so that they can look around and find out what they have just been up to. If it doesn’t become obvious to them at that point, it will by the next lesson. Then a simple experiment of not taking the step that their construct would dictate they take will show them what happens to them when they are not stepping back into their normal viscous circle. It is at this point of change that they experience themselves very differently.

I specifically do not use hands on because I do not want to ‘colour’ in any way their experience (at least as much as is possible). From my point of view, they don’t need a seductive new experience to tempt them to end-gain for, they are already having lots of experiences in their lives. The problem is that they are continually misinterpreting these experiences.

When they see the misinterpretation and can choose a different response, then their experience changes greatly. This new experience of the new way of operating is also undeniably their own experience. All I have helped them do is to put enough of their own information out on the table so that they can see why they are caught in their circle, and I’ve helped them identify the moment that they usually take action based on their misconceptions. Since that is the moment where they are doing something, that is the moment they can change.

“Do you have training in counselling techniques? When you alluded to “working with symptoms” I was reminded of “Process Work” (Arny Mindell’s work).”

No, I don’t (and I’m not familiar in practice with any counselling techniques), though several people have mentioned that what I am doing reminds them of cognitive psychology (others see connections with Bhuddism), but of course that doesn’t mean that the process is the same any more than AT and yoga are similar, yet people used to say a lot that it reminded them of yoga (at least until they’d had a few lessons).

I do find that a lot of emotion does come up, after all we are inevitably dealing right away with the biggest issues in

people's lives, but it is the same kind of emotion that comes up occasionally in AT lessons--the emotion of release and relief, the emotion of the intensity of what they are describing. It is not the emotions of anger or acting out emotions. There is nothing that I need to do with any of this. It's all part of the person experiencing their life and their changes fully.. In any case it passes and changes like all emotions.

The group setting is very good for this (though it certainly can be done one-to-one) since it provides a supportive atmosphere and almost inevitably, anyone's issue will resonate with others and make it easier for them to bring up their own questions and problems. Interestingly to me, when given complete freedom to bring up any problem that they have, most people do not mention their physical problems, even though they do have them. There is often a problem which is much bigger to them, though the physical problem they also have changes or diminishes for them as they understand and step out of the bigger one..

Let me know if you have other questions. This goes for anyone on the list. If you feel that these kind of questions (more about what I am doing than about the AT, etc.) are off-topic for this list, then just send me the questions privately and I will respond privately).

warmly,
David

Date: Sat, 4 Jul 1998 17:26:56 +0200
From: "Urban Larsson"
<urban.larsson@nacka.mail.telia.com>
To: <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: hello everybody

Hi, I am fairly new here, so I am just testing to see wether my text will arrive in the forum. I have enjoyed very much to read the discourse between DG and the readerds of his letter. I have learned a lot so far, and I hope that the conversation will go on with people like Peter Ruhrberg (the ironing lesson) and David Gorman for example.

I might join in at some point, but so far I have been busy enough and enjoying reading all the responses back and forth. A great fun forum!

Yours,
Urban

Date: Sun, 5 Jul 1998 11:42:17 -0500 (CDT)
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: poised@ix.netcom.com (McCullough)
Subject: The Alexander Technique and the Gorman Technique

I must confess that I too reacted quite defensively to David Gorman's postings. It was as much the way the message was delivered as the message itself.

First and foremost, this is a list for devotees of the Alexander Technique. It is if you will, a meeting house for people who are interested, to meet and discuss, debate and yes, sometimes strongly disagree about the Technique. But it seems to me that what Mr. Gorman is doing is like walking into a church and screaming that every "confirmed" member's beliefs are flawed and

worthless. It should come as no surprise that at least a few of us react defensively.

I would not have felt so defensive if Mr. Gorman had succinctly stated the principles he is basing his work on and invited us all to his Web site and discussion list to further access his writings. But he came to this list with nearly a 100 K manifesto, served with a 1988 copyright. This manifesto is a decade old. However...this is an Alexander Technique *discussion* list, not a David Gorman publishing house.

Alexander work is based on principles that are pretty well confirmed in other disciplines (i.e. inhibition, the wholeness of psycho-physical function, to state them briefly and incompletely.) Mr. Alexander did not own these principles (nor does any Alexander teacher or David Gorman for that matter.) He discovered them for himself. And he is probably not the only human to discover them. His contribution lies in his "pedagogy" or "technique" if you will, and that IS absolutely unique.

As for the content of the Mr. Gorman's message, the main divergence with Alexander's work that I can discern, is that Mr. Gorman feels that no one's "sensory appreciation" is debauched, and that somehow it is insulting to the human race to imply otherwise. Mr. Alexander of course, firmly believed that most people's sensory awareness is indeed debauched. I would venture to label "debauched sensory appreciation" as a condition, much like one might label a medical condition. I would not call this an "operating principle" of functioning, but rather an interference with the principles of functioning. If a teacher does not accept the notion of faulty sensory appreciation, then any teaching they do is not based on the pedagogy of the Alexander Technique, hence, they are not teaching the Alexander Technique. I think it is quite honest of Mr. Gorman to claim that he is not teaching the Alexander Technique.

But Mr. Gorman seems to believe that Alexander teachers are not capable of discerning "what is going on with the student" at any given moment. I firmly believe that skilled AT teachers can and do know what is going on with a student by the feedback they are getting about the student's muscular changes through their hands. I once witnessed a highly skilled teacher most convincingly demonstrate this. The teacher put a hand on the neck of a pianist and instructed her to think through one her piano pieces as if she were playing it. (The student had been complaining of her problems with a difficult passage.) This teacher was able to pinpoint exactly when the student "arrived" at the difficult passage, because of the changes in her balance and coordination.

I can't understand how any teacher can know what is "going on with" a student without hands on. No thought can manifest itself without producing a change in the musculature, thereby affecting overall coordination. These muscular changes are not always discernible to the eye. Muscular changes cannot be separated from the thought processes. Muscles are as much a part of thinking as the proverbial "gray matter." (I also can't discern from Mr. Gorman's writings whether he uses "hands-on" himself.)

But Alexander did not concern himself with muscles per se. He was concerned with the overall coordination of an individual. He did not investigate what somebody was doing with their arm if their arm ached, or what they were doing with their shoulder if their shoulder ached. He was

interested with how the person was interfering with their overall coordination, because he believed the malcoordination of the entire person was the cause. And he was highly skilled with discerning what the person was up to at any given moment. He was then able to draw the student's attention to what the student was up to. His method of restoring innate coordination was to "stop the interferences, so the right thing can do itself." (Through inhibition the reflexes are restored.)

Through his procedures, an understanding of the actual mechanics of coordination are taught. These mechanics are quite subtle, but profoundly affect the organism. One again, it seems impossible for anyone to greatly improve their own use or functioning without an understanding of these mechanics. Understanding these mechanics is not simply a matter of knowing where this or that joint is or the names of muscle groups. Good mechanics are born out through "directing" oneself throughout a movement. Alexander chose the movement in and out of the chair, because it is one of the most pervasive of any human activity. If one can move with good coordination in that activity, it is then possible to move with coordination in other activities. It is at this juncture that the student must apply what s/he has learned to other spheres of life. Here again, it is possible other pedagogies or techniques may exist or may yet be born to teach the mechanical aspect of human coordination.

Ann Penistan says that it becomes the teacher's skill that the student experiences, rather than their own. It is only for a moment that the student experiences the teacher's skill, when the moments with the teacher are over, the student must then learn to carry on for themselves. It would seem that is a basic learning process for any skill.

I believe that we all must separate out teaching pedagogies from the principles. It seems that the "pedagogy" or "technique" get confused with the principles of human functioning. None of us own those principles. My own defensiveness to David Gorman and Ann Penistan arises from my discernment from their writing that they consider the Alexander pedagogy to be obsolete. Obviously, they are entitled to their opinion, but if they came to the Alexander forum with a little more professional respect for Alexander teachers, perhaps more of those teachers would be interested in a dialogue.

Teaching the Alexander Technique is highly labor intensive and requires time and patience to become skilled at it.

I've inadvertently written my own manifesto here, it is past time for me to quit.

Carol McCullough

Date: Mon, 06 Jul 1998 02:17:06 +0100
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: Re: The Alexander Technique and the Gorman Technique

At 11:42 05-07-98 -0500, Carol McCullough wrote in response to David Gorman:

"...I've inadvertently written my own manifesto here"

Dear Carol,

Yes. It's a manifesto which makes great sense to me.

Best Wishes,
David Langstroth

Date: Mon, 6 Jul 1998 12:56:59 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
Subject: The Alexander Technique and the Gorman Technique
Cc: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>

Carol and List,

First, allow me to apologize for the way that I presented my thesis. It was certainly not my intention to insult or disrespect any of you. I do recognize that the nature of what I am saying is explosive, and certainly for myself and others has completely changed our understanding and our work. At the time I didn't have any better way to put forward my point. I shall look at how I did it and how I can present the material differently so as to invite people who see things one way to look at another way. By the way, the 1988 copyright was a typo, it should have been 1998.

I agree that this list is for "devotees of the Alexander Technique". This is why I pointedly asked if you were interested in me continuing before I sent my large posting to you all. I have ample experience of how some people respond when confronted with new ideas/methods that could change what they are already deeply invested in.

"I would not have felt so defensive if Mr. Gorman had succinctly stated the principles he is basing his work on and invited us all to his Web site and discussion list to further access his writings"

I would have been happy to have said a small amount and invited you to my web site, but there is no discussion list on my web site and there are very few recent writings there yet and certainly nothing that explains this territory.

"His [Alexander's] contribution lies in his "pedagogy" or "technique" if you will, and that IS absolutely unique."

It was this pedagogy and the belief systems it implies that I am looking at here. These very teaching techniques only make sense to do from the context of a way of seeing things. When we include the correlation between what is happening in the person's 'use' (in the Alexander sense) and what they are thinking/feeling/doing (from their own point of view), then the way of seeing things CAN change hugely.

"the main divergence with Alexander's work that I can discern, is that Mr. Gorman feels that no one's "sensory appreciation" is debauched, and that somehow it is insulting to the human race to imply otherwise"

You have misunderstood me. I definitely feel that people's sensory appreciation is debauched, or unreliable and said so in my long posting. But what I mean is not that their senses are debauched or unreliable, but that they are mis-appreciating or mis-interpreting what they are sensing. That is, that they have unreliable 'reality' appreciation--faulty belief systems, or untrue belief systems, or belief systems that do not match what actually happens.

My main divergence from the Alexander Technique, as I see it, is that rather than me or the pupil in any way changing or inhibiting their 'use' or coordination or physical functioning, I am helping them see what belief systems they do have and how those belief systems or constructs

inevitably channel them into reacting or acting in the only way that makes sense from that belief system, thereby repeating their experiences and reinforcing their belief system.

"I firmly believe that skilled AT teachers can and do know what is going on with a student by the feedback they are getting about the student's muscular changes through their hands."

You have just made my point for me in this quote. The Alexander teacher here regards "what is going on with a student" as something to do with their "muscular changes". I certainly agree that there will be muscular changes (and hormonal changes, and nervous system changes) in everything that happens to someone. But this does not tell you precisely what the student is thinking, or what they are feeling from their point of view, or what their belief system is. That you can ONLY get at through asking them.

Of course, you don't need to get at their inner life if the belief system is that when you change the muscular organization the person changes, but I can guarantee that it will be a real eye-opener if you begin to find out what the person is thinking and feeling at the moments of those "muscular changes", and from that get a sense of what their beliefs are, then add in the actions they take and why they think they are taking them, and correlate all this with what you, the outside person, can see/feel is happening to their 'use'.

"I can't understand how any teacher can know what is "going on with" a student without hands on. No thought can manifest itself without producing a change in the musculature, thereby affecting overall coordination."

It is simple. Ask them. But look at what you just wrote--"no thought can manifest itself without producing a change in the musculature, thereby affecting overall coordination". When you find out what the specific thoughts are that people are having and correlate them enough times with the "manifestation", you will see that it is always the same kind of manifestation appears with the same kind of thought.

When you further look at what these thoughts are and see how misconceived they can be (like the violinist who thought trying to play better actually would help her play better), and when you help your student make an experiment so that they can expose and see through this misconception (they actually play worse), you will see how this "overall coordination" has change all by itself when they are no longer operating under this faulty belief system.

"But Alexander did not concern himself with muscles per se. He was concerned with the overall coordination of an individual... ..He was interested with how the person was interfering with their overall coordination, because he believed the malcoordination of the entire person was the cause."

Here again we see that the Alexander belief system is that the person is interfering with their coordination. I don't know anyone who interferes with their coordination. There certainly are coordinations goings on which are full of conflict and strain, but the person is not doing them. What the person IS doing, however, is acting and reacting in various ways that make sense to them given their belief systems. The coordination (or mal-coordination if you like) that manifests is the coordination of operating under that

belief system--the strain of trying to do what cannot be done, the emotions of reaction to being in a world that is not the world that they think it is or should be, etc.

"And he was highly skilled with discerning what the person was up to at any given moment. He was then able to draw the student's attention to what the student was up to."

In my experience what this means is that the Alexander teacher is highly skilled at noticing the 'misuses' (the pulling down in sitting, the shoulder fixing in ironing). They then draw the student's attention to these things under the belief that the student is doing them, but does not yet know it. In my experience what an Alexander teacher does not usually do is to notice the student's pulling down or whatever, and then find out what the student thought they were up to and work with that, not the pulling down...

"Once again, it seems impossible for anyone to greatly improve their own use or functioning without an understanding of these mechanics."

It is not at all impossible, in fact it is very simple and much faster when we find the underlying cause rather than trying to direct through a movement or understand the subtle mechanics. When the faulty beliefs systems are exposed and become more accurate, these mechanics change in a totally coordinated and integrated way all by themselves.

"Ann Penistan says that it becomes the teacher's skill that the student experiences, rather than their own. It is only for a moment that the student experiences the teacher's skill, when the moments with the teacher are over, the student must then learn to carry on for themselves."

It is the teacher's use and skill the pupil experiences rather than their own--this is why a pupil has such different experiences from teachers trained in different ways. What they are experiencing is NOT what 'good use' is like, the pupil is experiencing what it feels like to have a skilled human being devote their entire attention to them with a particular belief system driving it. In other words, they are experiencing the RELATIONSHIP with the teacher. On the other hand, when someone makes the experiment of changing the actions they normally do because of their belief system, they usually feel very different. But it is a difference that cannot possibly be from the physical skill of the teacher since no teacher has been touching them nor in any way proposing a better physical/functional coordination.

"Obviously, they are entitled to their opinion, but if they came to the Alexander forum with a little more professional respect for Alexander teachers, perhaps more of those teachers would be interested in a dialogue."

I have a great deal of professional respect for Alexander teachers, remember I was one for close to 17 years. I respect you all enough to venture to bring this forward to you. If I didn't respect you I would not have bothered to mention it at all. But, I don't have respect for Alexander teachers in a blanket sense, I have respect for the spirit of enquiry and a willingness to look at things and learn and anyone who can do that even if what is being proposed goes against their "cherished beliefs".

I will certainly do my best to be as aware of everyone's sensibilities. I'm not sure how much I can manage to say what I have to say any different because it is what it is and I cannot make that any easier to swallow than it is...

warmly, David

Date: Sun, 5 Jul 1998 15:45:32 -0500 (CDT)
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: poised@ix.netcom.com (McCullough)
Subject: teaching violinists and "ironists"

Dear List,

For those persons on the list who took an interest in the Alexander Teachers who described their thinking while giving a lesson, I'd like to give quite an opposite methodology of working with a student.

I have observed Alexander Teachers who work with a student DIRECTLY during the student's activity of choice (like playing a musical instrument or ironing). Other teachers work INDIRECTLY with the student's activities by exclusively using chairwork, tablework, and positions of mechanical advantage (of course, through "hands-on" private lessons). The student eventually develops a "back" so that the symptoms disappear. Those teachers hardly discuss the student's perceived symptom, medical condition, or state of underperformance - the teacher knows that overall uncoordination of mind/body/emotion is what's to be looked at.

It may take quite a series of lessons (20-30) before these teachers using the INDIRECT method will work directly with a student's individual activity. The reason for this is that a student's favorite (or problematic) activity is wrapped up in emotion and personal/professional junk. The student's habits under those DIRECT usages are strong; and the lesson can become very confusing. Only after a good series of lessons working on the "basics" is a student ready to touch the instrument in a lesson.

Many students end-gain and are only interested in tips & tricks in order to do their favorite activity better.

I only took my trombone into the teacher training course ONCE in the 3-year period of teacher training. The lesson consisted of my teacher improving (or letting me improve) my conditions of use during the traditional lesson; he then walked over to my trombone lying on the floor; and *he* handed the trombone to *me*. That's it - I didn't play a note!! Lest anyone think that that teacher trainer didn't know how to work with musicians, let me say that he played in a major orchestra for years, and takes a joyful approach to practicing music every morning before the training course begins for the day. At the time, of course, I wanted to play for the teacher and have him improve my playing. But a good teacher, I believe, leaves it up to the student to figure out for themselves how to apply the Alexander Technique to their specific activities.

I believe Alexander used the indirect approach. And, every time I pick up my trombone I'm glad I have a "back" with which to play it.

Brian McCullough, Teacher of the Alexander Technique, Minneapolis, Minnesota USA

Date: Mon, 06 Jul 1998 02:01:55 +0100
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: Re: teaching violinists and "ironists"
Brian McCullough wrote:

"I believe Alexander used the indirect approach. And, every time I pick up my trombone I'm glad I have a "back" with which to play it."

Dear Brian,

I am a musician in a major symphony orchestra and I too am glad of the indirect approach. In 10 years of Alexander work I have never taken my double bass to an Alexander technique lesson. The benefit to my playing (and to everything else) has been enormous!

Best wishes,
David Langstroth

Date: Mon, 6 Jul 1998 18:20:50 EDT
To: alextech@compuserve.com
From: ROSMATT@aol.com
Subject: Re: The Alexander Technique and the Gorman Technique

I think I noticed a contradiction in David Gorman's last posting. He said that Alexander teachers should work with what the student thinks they're doing, not focus on the misuse itself. Yet he admits that debauched kinesthesia exists. Surely the student needs someone with a more reliable sensory register to guide them by alerting them to the unfortunate reality (ie. wrong thinking) of their situation- not someone trying to guess what confused directions the pupil may be giving themselves. As Alexander noted- down is not up! The idea of the technique is inhibition- undoing the bad habits. If one is not persistently made aware by the teacher of these habits- eg. "You're still pulling down in front" or "There's a lot of tension in your armpits" (two choice examples from my own teacher) - then the student has less chance, it seems to me of stopping doing the wrong thing so that the right thing can do itself. It seems essential to me to become more and more conscious of the actuality of one's own error so as to be able to conquer it. Focusing on the original unconscious and incorrect behaviour would seem to be a self defeating strategy. To summarise with another of Alexander's poignant observations- all we shall know in this life is when we are wrong!

Matt Stapleton, Cornwall, 6.7.98

Date: Sun, 5 Jul 1998 22:06:05 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: re: reply to reply etc. to David Gorman, v. 2
My former message contains two serious errors, please take this one instead!

Dear David,

Thank you very much for your taking up the chance to discuss the different possibilities for going about situations in teaching.

I have to admit that I've chosen that specific example of my lesson and the things that I included in my description on purpose, because I suspected that in this way we could best work out the differences in both doctrine and method which we use. And I think you've done a brilliant job in gathering up the different threads which arose from that lesson.

Please understand that the following reply will be far from complete and far from what both of us would probably gain if we were to talk about these issues directly. But, as this is the medium, here we go ...

I have the impression that the kind of teaching you propose is something which addresses very important issues, while the way of teaching that is generally known as the Alexander Technique, only scratches the surface of some of those issues.

I also want to say that sometimes I choose an approach which is much more similar to the one you described in your violinist lesson. There are lessons in which we don't even get close to any activity which the student wanted to perform, because the REAL ISSUE behind certain "misuses", the REAL POWER why people are doing things, and why they are doing them in the ways they are doing them, shows itself in so beautiful and powerful ways, that it would be a lost chance if I would not encourage the students to explore their "motives" for themselves.

But this all depends on the conditions present. I certainly would tend to resist the temptation to teach in just another "one way" -- which, by the way, is not what I think that you do either.

However, before I enter into a discussion of the differences in the approaches, please let me say first something about belief systems and "truth".

Something I often say to myself and my students is "belief systems are like noses. Everybody's got one."

You, David, are operating from your belief system as certainly as I'm from mine. This may seem a truism, but I think what we have to face is that the decisions which result from our belief systems will in turn determine the pathway which we follow, which in turn will determine the result(s) that we end up with.

This brings me (for a moment) to the current discussion about "truth or not truth": up to this day I have yet to meet someone in the human history who was able to prove conclusively that there is "A TRUTH" or "THE TRUTH", or that there isn't. (If there isn't anything like THE TRUTH, I think it would be pretty difficult to prove it, because that proof would be the new "THE TRUTH".) Be it as it may -- personally, I can't be bothered whether it's likely to be one way or the other, because either way it's just another opinion, or belief, that people hold and act upon, and don't agree with each other.

So putting aside the question whether there is "a truth" or not, what I have experienced in my life is that there are principles which govern the sequences of causes and effects. There are also principles which govern human effectiveness. And one of the principles that I've found to be true each and every time is that we are so wonderfully made that we have the capacity to make come true almost every belief we hold.

In fact, what I happen to "believe" is that this principle is the one which is perhaps more important than any other principle in the Alexander Technique, or in life, for that matter.

Let me say this again: no matter what we believe to be true, we seem to have that incredible "power of the conscious mind" with which we can "make" true almost everything we believe.

If what we wish to gain with our belief (the "end") is achievable and our process with which we employ to achieve that end is appropriate then we can't but help achieving our end.

I'm certainly not the first who says this. In fact, isn't there on the Alexander market a book called "What you think is what you get"?

But there was another person who seems to have said something like that. Let's see:

"The physical, mental and spiritual potentialities of the human being are greater than we have ever realized, greater, perhaps, than the human mind in its present evolutionary stage is capable of realizing." (MSI 1946, p.5f)

BUT, if it is "true" that we have the potential to eventually end up with the thing which we believed in, wouldn't it make sense that we decide to be careful with what we believe, and to choose to believe in things which might help us, and see what happens?

You see, I don't think that there is a "right way" of doing Mr Alexander's work. I don't think that there is any "right way" of learning, conceiving, understanding, or going about this work. I don't even think that there are any "right" answers.

What I certainly hold out to my students is the opportunity to study how Alexander tried to describe his work and his findings, but let THEM decide what to think about his (and any of my) statements. So I don't say what people have to believe in, but bring them into contact with facts: "look, this is what Alexander said, you don't have to believe it, but we can be certain that he did."

The following quote is again an example of the things FM apparently believed:

"After working for a lifetime in this new field I am conscious that the knowledge gained is but a beginning, but I think I may confidently predict that those who are sufficiently interested in the findings I have recorded, and who will be guided by them in any further search, will find their outlook and understanding towards the question of the control of human reaction (behaviour) so completely changed that they will see that the knowledge of the self is fundamental to all other knowledge, particularly to that which can make for the raising of the standard of human understanding and reaction essential to a sane plan of civilization." (UCL 1946, p.xxxviii)

I think that about 40 years after FM's death we certainly did make some progress, but "that the knowledge gained is (still) but a beginning".

In this connection, what does Marjorie Barlow (who calls herself a "preservationist") tell us FM thought about how to teach?

"FM used to say, 'I don't want a lot of monkeys imitating me. I want you to watch what I do, and try and understand WHY I do it, then each of you will develop your own way of teaching, your own way of imparting what you know according to your own individuality.' He used to say, 'Variations of the teacher's art.'" (at the Brighton Congress 1988) "He knew that wide variation in teaching method was inevitable and desirable He expected us to show initiative and make discoveries for ourselves." (Alexander Journal 5, 1966)

Now that I have thus prepared the ground, let's come closer to the lesson we're discussing.

The most important question I have to ask you is: could you describe what you mean by your phrase "what a person is actually up to"?

I have to ask this for more than one reason.

Firstly, it appears as one of the central phrases you use, and I think I should be quite clear as to the meaning which the phrase is intended to convey, before I attempt to act upon them. (Haven't I read this phrase somewhere before?)

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, although I'm working constantly to improve my English, to me it is still a second language.

So, does the phrase "what a person is actually up to" have to do with what the person is "really" trying to achieve in his activities? Is it somewhat of a hidden agenda that a person tries to fulfil? Is it a thing that a person is trying to get at, no matter if it is either the fulfilment of some specific agenda associated with that specific activity or a sort of an expression of the whole person which is accomplished in everything they do? Is it something that people think they have to "express", no matter how high the costs may get? (Could we use for it that brilliant phrase that Emerson sometimes used, "what you are speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you're talking about"?)

Is it connected with what FM called the "primary desire", the desire with which we force ourselves to act according to our beliefs (or feelings), the desire to make real anything we believe in, even if that belief turns out to be based on a misconception? (FM defined it as the desire to feel right in the gaining of your end, and his definition, of course, is also an opinion.)

Now, even without a clear knowledge of the meaning of that special phrase, I'd like to continue, and should I come back to it, please remember that I'm conscious of my "not knowing" and please let me know in case you feel misrepresented.

I am perfectly in agreement with David that I have to have a lot of certain "beliefs" in order to act as I did in the lesson. By the same token, David has to have a lot of beliefs as well which underlie his teaching method.

Now, I understand quite well that, for the core of David's argument, it is not so much important what "specific" beliefs I actually might hold, rather than it is important to learn to become clear, conscious, and finally deliberate about which beliefs I will choose in order to live a successful life, which in my case and at this time would include successful teaching. This indeed is one of the areas I'm constantly working at, and perhaps I will be doing so for the rest of my life.

But I'm not quite in agreement with his assumptions, as stated, of what my beliefs are. (To make assumptions about what other people think or believe is a thing which I'm constantly trying to avoid, though I have to admit that I'm still far from being completely successful in this regard. What I'm trying to do as far as possible is to ask other people about what they think or believe. I certainly do this not all the time, but constantly -- of course, in agreement with what I think is appropriate, be it in a lesson or elsewhere)

Now, more in detail:

"... There is an assumption that the shoulder/arm movements as you did see them WERE the problem and the reason for the pain."

Well, I'm not quite sure if I would see causal relationships as simple as this. Pain is one of the most complex issues that I've ever run into, and, not surprisingly, even the experts in this field don't agree at all with each other. (So the Alexander Teachers are not the only experts lucky enough to disagree on fundamental issues...)

But the real point I want to make here is that I don't consider myself to be in the pain-chasing business. My experience is that pain is the last event which appears in a long chain, and the first one which will disappear. So if people come with pain, in certain circumstances I sometimes REGRET when the pain disappears during or after lessons. (One of the reasons for my regret is that some people, having had that experience, are likely to stop at once working out further the process that had been proven beneficial to them in the first place.)

I just don't know whether or not a certain movement behaviour is actually causing a problem (pain or whatever). It's just not part of my current expertise. But I consider my work as dependent on principles, not on whether or not students have certain specific problems. This is one of the reasons why I wrote in my article (capitals added):

"What I do in a lesson is dependent upon the conditions present and upon what the student and I can recognize as the conception (belief, belief system) underlying the thinking underlying the movement (WHICH MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT ACTUALLY CAUSE A PROBLEM)."

Now, for the next assumption:

"And there is the assumption that if she learns to move her shoulder/arm according to how it "is actually made to move", she will have solved her ironing problem."

This assumption is somewhat split. I certainly believe that there is a value in learning to move in accordance with the design of the structures involved.

But I don't think that she will have solved her "ironing problem" by learning to move her arm according to its structure, because I did not assume in the first place that there was any "ironing problem". Should there be an "ironing problem", I perfectly would agree with David that the Alexander Technique is just ONE of the tools to deal with that problem, because there might also be other causes to the problem which have nothing to do with the field that Mr Alexander's Technique is working on.

What I assume is that she would move in a certain, characteristic, HER way while ironing, and that *"this [would be] the use which [she] habitually [brings] into play for all [her] activities, that it [is] what I may call the "habitual use" of [herself], and that [her] desire to [iron], like any other stimulus to activity, would inevitably cause this habitual wrong use to come into play"* (UoS 1946, p.12)

And what I assume is that THE WAY IN WHICH SHE MOVES IS PERFECTLY SUITED TO THE PURPOSE OF ACTING IN ACCORDANCE WITH HER CONCEPTIONS, IDEAS AND BELIEFS AS TO WHAT IS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO DO FOR ANY GIVEN ACTIVITY, including ironing.

"And, of course, there is the assumption that this is how the shoulder/arm is ACTUALLY "made to move."

Well, at the risk of repeating myself, I must say that the following is just ONE of many concepts that people can hold with regard to "reality". But it happens to be certainly one of my concepts.

(By the way, what I do with those concepts is very simple: I act on them AS IF they were true, and let Nature give me the answers on the experiments I undertake on the basis of those concepts, and then compare the answers I got with my predictions. If they match, I'll continue with my approach. If they don't, I'll change it. Again, please understand that I understand that even this mode of procedure represents a certain underlying belief, the belief, namely, that this procedure actually works, and that we really can find out in practice whether what we assumed as our concepts works well in practice or not, and perhaps why.)

One of the things that I also believe to be true ("except when forced to do otherwise", as FM wrote) is that we are born with a certain structure within which we are meant to live.

This "structure" could be described as the structural aspects of our organisms, the more physical aspects of which could (but not necessarily must) be described in anatomical or physiological terms, like "the skeleton", "muscles", "nerves", "brain", and so on. I would like to define "structure" with the term "what we have".

And there is also the concept of "function", that is, what we do with our structure. I would define "function" as "how we use what we have".

(Again, these "tools" may represent a somewhat simple model, but I choose consciously to take the simple model first and take it as far as I can, and then, if the issues I'm dealing with turn out to be more complex than my first model can correspond to, I'll choose to come up with a new -- and perhaps, but not necessarily more complex -- model in order to explain things, and so on.)

There seems to be a condition in which we are using our structure more according to the way in which the structure is actually designed. (Again, there are more beliefs: that we can understand what this structure and this condition are actually like, that it would be a good thing to use the structure in the way for which it is designed, and finally, what a good way to get to this condition would consist of.)

What I've experienced without fail is that if people come to a growing understanding what their structure is like, that they then can use this understanding -- among other tools, of course -- in order to become increasingly able to direct their use of themselves in any activity in a way that is much more likely to work for the best advantage of that structure. This improvement can be watched by any outside observer, and it can be described either in simple, physical, mechanical terms, or we could also summarize the different things we see and describe it simply as "simplicity" or "efficiency" of movement. (These two terms certainly represent some of the positive values I hold in my teaching of the Alexander Technique.)

If anyone is still reading, we're now approaching what I consider to be the core of David's argument.

"What if her whole coordination (not just her shoulder/arm) as she normally went about ironing was a perfectly integrated coordination of what she is actually up to?"

D'accord. That's certainly one of the things I believe, too. No question about it.

"We don't know what she is actually up to in this lesson because you got her involved in changing her 'manner of use' of her shoulder/arm rather than finding out what she was doing/feeling/thinking while she was ironing."

Now, this is one of the central arguments that somebody can bring up with regard to what I believe is one of the cornerstones of Mr Alexander's Technique.

It is the first part of the first process with which FM begins to discipline his thinking (as described in his chapter "Evolution of a Technique", after the section in which he had to face the fact that *"all [his] efforts up till now to improve the use of [himself] in reciting had been misdirected."* -- UoS 1946, p.13)

The passage reads as follows:

"... I came to see that to get a direction of my use which would ENSURE this satisfactory reaction, I must cease to rely upon the feeling associated with my instinctive direction, and in its place employ my reasoning processes, in order (1) to analyse the conditions of use present ..." (UoS 1946, p.17)

Now, here we clearly are at crossroads, because I think we have to decide each and every time what components are essential for describing "the conditions of use" and we have to decide what is "present".

At this stage of the teaching/learning process, in order to achieve a constructive change in our lives, in many cases it may be really important to look at "what people are actually up to".

But I can also remember students which are already so involved in finding out what they are actually up to, that what they do in her activity of finding it out they are actually throwing more rocks in front of their way and wonder why they don't get any further.

What I would vote for is to get a balance in the assessment of what is actually needed for a specific situation, and to renew the assessment of what is needed every single time, that means, every single lesson and during every single minute interaction during that lesson. (This, by the way, is one of the ways I understand the word "present" in FM's passage quote above.)

"What you taught her will certainly enable her to take control of her physical system more and more as she 'learns' how her arm works, and another time in a different activity, how her legs work and another time, how her bending or breathing works, etc. And with all this learning her physical functioning will probably be a lot better."

This, again, depends on how you see it. I'm not convinced that my students get more control of their "physical system", but more of an understanding how they can choose the manner of their reaction to their IDEA of carrying out ANY activity, INCLUDING "finding out what one is doing/feeling/thinking while doing another activity." This growing understanding and learning to choose the manner of their reaction to their idea of carrying out any activity, in my experience, is certainly one of the things which will greatly contribute in learning how to less interfere with our built-in, "natural" co-ordination.

"BUT, she will not have found out IF there was something in the way SHE was going about the ironing that her system was letting her know was not constructive. By she I

mean not what her arm/shoulder functioning was, but what the human being was up to."

Here we will have to decide about another central issue of teaching anything, in particular Mr Alexander's technique. It is whether or not there has to be something present that "her system was letting her know was not constructive", or an "ironing problem" or a "problem with (fill in the blank)" in order to teach or to learn the Alexander Technique. In other words, here we have to decide to which degree in our teaching Mr Alexander's Technique is really meant to be preventive.

But we also would have to decide once more about the issue of "unreliability of feelings". My favourite example in this connection is: how are we to evaluate the students which come with no pain at all, but stiff like broomsticks in their movements, and almost painful to look at, and really painful if they run into me accidentally? What if they begin to learn to discipline their mind according to the different steps of accomplishment which Mr Alexander wrote down in his "Evolution of a Technique" (beginning with the passage on p. 17 which I quoted before), therefore begin to stop to exert unnecessary muscular contractions against themselves during their activities, and THEN begin to experience severe pain in practically every activity or situation? How would we evaluate this phenomenon according to the teaching model that David holds out? (Please understand, that I don't think that things are "one way or the other," and that I don't believe that David thinks it, either. What I'm trying to avoid is just that building up of the misconception that it HAS TO BE "one way or the other".)

"Instead she will have learned to override her 'innate' coordination in favour of a learned one."

This is an assessment with which I clearly disagree, because (again, as I see it) what you believe to be an 'innate' co-ordination, I think is in fact a learned co-ordination.

This is because I honestly believe that nobody does anything which really doesn't make sense to him/her. Consequently, I believe that we have developed every single movement behaviour that we make for a very good reason. And one of the almost universal reasons I have found in my teaching is that at the time we did that movement behaviour for the first time, it WORKED. We had success with it. because we had success with it, we tend to believe that it was appropriate for the purpose (even if it was not, as seen by outside observers). And so we tend to use this behaviour AGAIN when it comes to deal with a situation which we experience at least as similar, rather than finding out anew each and every time which "means" would best serve the purpose. In this way we often have success IN SPITE of what we think we should do in order to be successful.

What you describe as 'innate' coordination, the co-ordination that Alexander Teachers are likely to see in "non-alexanderized" people, has several elements in it: our natural co-ordination, influences of injuries or/and diseases, and a third part which, in my view, Mr Alexander's technique is designed to address. This third part is the learned ideas which we impose on ourselves about what we have to do in order to perform any activity or to accomplish any given task.

If, by acting on those learned ideas, we limit -- in everything we do -- our capacity to improve our general standard of health and performance, then wouldn't it make sense to question our learned ideas on which we have based our thoughts and actions, and to put aside the ideas and thoughts which have proved to be non-helpful and limiting, and to learn in their stead new ones which now make more sense to us?

"In any case the purpose here is to correlate the physical/functional organization (what you see and she feels as pain) with her inner life, her attitude, her beliefs, etc. In order to actually find out what, in any correlation, there is, one needs to NOT jump in and use your 'Alexander' tools to fix things up..."

As I said before, I'm certainly willing to agree with you that in certain cases your 'David Gorman' tools are more appropriate and therefore will work better. But I think we have to decide about which 'tools' to choose EACH AND EVERY TIME. This is one of the things which I would understand by FM's phrase "variations of the teacher's art."

"... if we have even the possibility that there is nothing that needs fixing in the organization or coordination, but rather in the whole lived construct, then we have a very different kettle of fish.... If she found where and how she was misconceiving reality, she would have learned more, and the physical functioning of her body would take care of itself, as it was doing before ..."

Again, I couldn't agree with you more, David. This, in effect, is what I'm really trying to do in each and every case in my lessons, even if my lessons sometimes (as in the example I chose) may look very different from the one you described with the violinist.

However we are going to put into practice what you propose as more helpful in teaching, our success will depend on what we decide about how to put into practice also the following advice of Alexander:

"... where ideas that are patently erroneous have already been formed in the [student's] mind, the teacher should take pains to apprehend these preconceptions, and in dealing with them he should not attempt to overlay them, but should eradicate them as far as possible before teaching or submitting the new and correct idea." (MSI 1946, p.87)

I'd like to add these short concluding remarks.

Because I see myself unable to evaluate your learning method from the stated principles alone upon which it is based, and because I'm curious by nature, obviously my next step will be to see and experience myself your work in operation at some time in the future.

Thank you very much for sharing and letting me share our mutual "belief systems". (Why am I getting the impression that this exchange, too, is perhaps part of your learning method?) Please let's continue the constructive dialogue.

All the best
Peter

Date: Sun, 5 Jul 1998 22:46:38 +0200
From: "Urban Larsson"
<urban.larsson@nacka.mail.telia.com>
To: <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>

Subject: question to Peter Ruhrberg

Dear Peter Ruhrberg,

Since I am reading and enjoying yours and David Gormans conversation, I might just as well pop in to make a comment on the last mail that you wrote:

Your recent contribution (v.2) is somewhat difficult to understand for me. It seems to me that you might not have decided for yourself whether you are in a "learning situation" or not... By being a learner (I believe) you would need to take Mr Gorman's suggestions and explore them for a little while AND leave your own statements for the time being while making the experiment suggested, and then (after the experiment is made) draw your conclusions and share with us.

I am very curious to read more about how you regard the differences after you have made the "different" experiment. (From everything that has been written so far on this Forum about the differences between "Alexander Technique" and "Gorman Technique" it might be possible for you to begin a change even before attending a workshop. Good luck!) (I will go to Mr Gorman's workshop tomorrow.... after that I might have changed my mind....) however, thank you for contributing in an interesting way and sharing your ways of working.

best wishes,
Urban

Date: Tue, 7 Jul 1998 10:22:41 +0200
From: Peter Ruhrberg <pruhrberg.at@cityweb.de>
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
Subject: Re: Urban Larsson's question/comment

Dear Urban,

on 06/07/98, you wrote:

"It seems to me that you might not have decided for yourself whether you are in a "learning situation" or not... By being a learner (I believe) you would need to take Mr Gorman's suggestions and explore them for a little while AND leave your own statements for the time being while making the experiment suggested, and then (after the experiment is made) draw your conclusions and share with us."

Let me tell you where David and I are in our discussion.

In his most recent response to my account of my lesson, 04/07/98, David Gorman wrote:

"Since [Peter was] responding to my invitation to correlate: "people's actual thoughts/feelings/actions, AS EXPERIENCED BY THOSE PEOPLE, with the physical/functional coordinations AS SEEN BY ANY OUTSIDER."

and to:

"bring forward what you have found and how it relates to what makes sense to do to help someone. AND how you feel this relates to the 'Alexander Technique' as it is usually practiced."

Now, "we can debate the interpretations."

That's exactly how I see it.

I felt that I did more than once the experiment of correlating student's experiences with my own observations (in the way I understand it). That's why I reported my "ironing" lesson. I chose an example of a lesson which I think was

different from David's violinist lesson in some significant ways.

David and I are now in the process of debating the interpretations. I see David and me as colleagues for the moment, not as teacher and student. Therefore I've decided to be NOT in something you've called a "learning situation" for now. The purpose of my last (long, and somewhat complex) contribution to the debate was

1) to make clear that I certainly appreciate the importance of what people (students and also teachers) BELIEVE is true,

2) to show that I now can see more clearly some of the differences in principles, beliefs, and basic premises underlying his teaching method and my own,

3) to correct some of his assumptions about my assumptions,

4) to state that I still think that David's method is more based on Mr Alexander's technique than not, and

5) to say that solely from the basic principles and premises which he told us in his article (and subsequent discussions) I cannot tell whether or not his practical method in teaching is something that would I like to do.

Therefore, I'd like to go to one of his workshops and experience it in operation. IN HIS WORKSHOP, I CERTAINLY DECIDE TO BECOME A STUDENT as long as the workshop goes, because I then will see it as David Gorman's workshop, not our present debate about different experiences in our experiments.

Could that help clear things up?

Thank you for your interest.

Peter Ruhrberg

Date: Tue, 07 Jul 1998 01:58:50 +0100

To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu

From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>

Subject: Judging our success or failure

Dear List,

In giving lessons in the Alexander Technique what is the aim? Obviously there is a desire to improve the student's conditions, but I hope most will agree with me that the more important aim is to give the student the means to change their own conditions.

Thus we would hope that a student would gain from her lessons not just "improvement", but an understanding of the means to improve herself, and crucially, the means to judge her efforts, to know when she is succeeding and when she is not.

In all the plans for self-improvement, The Alexander Technique is unique in having an entirely rational criteria for judgement. If you have inhibited and directed correctly then you can judge that you have successfully completed a constructive act towards your self-improvement, no matter what it feels like. In fact it is likely to feel wrong in any number of ways. You don't rely on your feelings to know whether you're getting it right.

In other methods of self-improvement what criteria is the student given to judge their own efforts? Feeling? In the case of David Gorman's method, if the student experiments with their beliefs how do they know when they have found the one which doesn't work? Is it because it feels better when they abandon it? Does the pain go

away? Do they feel lighter? Is this a reliable criteria to be using? If he's had years of Alexander experience the teacher may be saturated with an understanding of use which enables him to make these judgements in the lesson and guide the student's thinking, but is the student gaining this criteria to judge her own efforts? And, how will future generations of teachers be able to make such judgements? Will they depend entirely on what the student says feels better?

What is special about the technique is that it gives us a rational criteria to judge our efforts. It does not rely on searching for what "feels like" improvement. This unique criteria to judge our success or failure is in my opinion of such central importance that we cannot state it often enough.

Best Wishes to all,
David Langstroth

Date: Tue, 7 Jul 1998 03:49:20 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
Subject: re: Judging our success or failure
Cc: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>

To David and list,

David Langstroth writes on July 7th, 1998,
"In other methods of self-improvement what criteria is the student given to judge their own efforts? Feeling? In the case of David Gorman's method, if the student experiments with their beliefs how do they know when they have found the one which doesn't work? Is it because it feels better when they abandon it? Does the pain go away? Do they feel lighter?"

No, it is not through feeling, though someone's experience of operating under their normal 'reality' construct will change to a very different way of being when that construct changes. The change for people is that they can now directly see how deluded their previous set of beliefs was.

Example: a person who suffered from fear of flying and had huge nervousness for days before a flight, discovered that it wasn't just an experience of fear she suffered--she always started to imagine some disaster (the plane crashing) just before she felt the fear. When she could really take in that she was IMAGINING IT--IT WAS NOT HAPPENING, it became clear to her that she was reacting to her own imagination not the reality of what the plane would do. Now, she can perceive right away whenever she starts imagining and she KNOWS that these imagining are not real and she does not have a fear of flying--in fact she rather enjoys the take-off now.

The criteria for her is not that she feels better, it is that from her new knowledge, if any thoughts about the plane which might come back, she can tell right away that they are not true. She sees through the delusion of faulty appreciation, the same way that someone on a hill looking down at a hedge maze can see easily how to get out, but when they were in it there completely trapped.

David also writes:

"The Alexander Technique is unique in having an entirely rational criteria for judgement. If you have inhibited and directed correctly then you can judge that you have

successfully completed a constructive act towards your self-improvement, no matter what it feels like."

I have a question for you. How, in your understanding, does a pupil know when they "have inhibited and directed correctly"?

warmly,
David

Date: Tue, 7 Jul 1998 00:36:49 EDT
To: alextech@compuserve.com,
alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu
From: JohnC10303@aol.com
Subject: SON of final exercise in futility

Hello list:

It appears we are to have more 'final' farewells from David Gorman than Luisa Tetrzzini.

"I do recognize that the nature of what I am saying is explosive"

Only your claims to innovation and the formation of a new sect are explosive; not the practical, teaching aspects of your posts.

"But what I mean is not that their senses are debauched or unreliable, but that they are mis-appreciating or mis-interpreting what they are sensing. That is, that they have unreliable 'reality' appreciation--faulty belief systems, or untrue belief systems, or belief systems that do not match what actually happens."

This is circular reasoning. They misinterpret reality as registered by their senses because of their faulty belief systems--their inaccurate interpretations cause them to 'experience reality' in a false manner - their experience is their only guide in forming belief systems.

"But this does not tell you precisely what the student is thinking, or what they are feeling from their point of view, or what their belief system is. That you can ONLY get at through asking them."

Asking them? IF the pupil can understand the question. IF the pupil can form an answer on a subject he may never have thought about before. IF the pupil can perfectly express his thoughts. IF you can understand what the pupil means. Of course it is worth while to ask the pupil, and look at the pupil, and listen with your hands. But to assume that you can EVER know "precisely what the student is thinking, or what they are feeling from their point of view, or what their belief system is" is hubris.

"In my experience what an Alexander teacher does not usually do is to notice the student's pulling down or whatever, and then find out what the student thought they were up to and work with that, not the pulling down..."

More's the pity, because that is what FM indicated we should be doing.

"When the faulty beliefs systems are exposed and become more accurate, these mechanics change in a totally coordinated and integrated way all by themselves."

And how are they exposed, how do they become more accurate? By telling the pupil? Some new experience must be involved.

"It is the teacher's use and skill the pupil experiences rather than their own"

This is one of the most dangerous misconceptions Alexander teachers fall into. When, for example, the pupil rises from the chair in a manner contrary to his old conception of the act, HE has performed a NEW act produced by HIS OWN muscles acting along new lines. IT IS THE PUPIL'S DIRECTION WHICH CAUSES THE CHANGE, NOT THE TEACHER'S. There is a great danger that the pupil or the teacher may assume that the change was caused by some magical property of the teacher's hands. Skilled teaching should steer the pupil away from this illusion as smoothly as possible.

"I will certainly do my best to be as aware of everyone's sensibilities. I'm not sure how much I can manage to say what I have to say any different because it is what it is and I cannot make that any easier to swallow than it is..."

It is good to hear neglected aspects of the Technique brought to the attention of the list. My sensibilities can handle it just fine thank you. As to 'what it is' please see the quotes I have appended below.

Some precursors of LearningMethods®

MSI "Conscious Control"

In this case my first endeavour must be directed to keeping in abeyance, by the power of inhibition, all the mental associations connected with the ideas of speaking, and to eradicating all erroneous, preconceived ideas concerning the things X imagines he can or cannot do, . . .

MSI Part II ch. 3 "The Processes of Conscious Guidance and Control"

In the performance of any muscular action by conscious guidance control there are four essential stages:

- 1. The conception of the movement required;*
- 2. The inhibition of erroneous preconceived ideas which subconsciously suggest the manner in which the movement or series of movements should be performed;*
- 3. The new and conscious mental orders which will set in motion the muscular mechanism essential to the correct performance of the action;*
- 4. The movements (contractions and expansions) of the muscles which carry out the mental orders.*

MSI "Habits of Thought and Body"

. . . he must discover, or find someone who can discover for him, what his defects are in the uses indicated. When this has been done he must proceed to inhibit the guiding sensations which cause him to use the mechanism imperfectly; . . .

Ask a friend to lift a chair or any other object . . . You will see at once that your friend will approach the task with a definite preconception as to the amount of physical tension necessary. His mind is exclusively occupied with the question of his own muscular effort, instead of with the purpose in front of him . . .

CCC Part II ch. 2 "Incorrect Conception"

In the matter of conception, the first step is to convince the pupil that his present misdirected activities are the result of incorrect conception and of imperfect sensory appreciation (feeling).

The teacher experienced in the work of re-education can diagnose at once, by the expression and use of the pupil's eyes, the degree of influence upon him of such conceptions . . .

CCC part II ch. 3 "Imperfect Sensory Appreciation"

The teacher therefore asks him to perform:

1. an inhibitory act, by inhibiting "his way" of taking breath- in other words, by preventing or holding in check, in connection with the act, the wrong subconscious guidance and direction, which constitutes the bad habit he has formed when taking breath . . .

2. a volitional act, by giving himself certain orders . . .

Love and Service

John Coffin

Date: Tue, 7 Jul 1998 09:37:09 +0200

From: "Tom Koch" <Alextech@direct.A2000.nl>

To: <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>

Subject: Re: On Belief Systems and Learning, part 3 of 3

Hello List and David Gorman --

I must agree with the assessment of others that David has managed to extract some of Alexander's ideas and call them his own. Other than the name of David's "new" technique, I have found absolutely nothing new in David's description of his work. I was always taught that the important thing in the AT work is to change my intentions, not my tensions. Is this not what David is describing?

I trained from 1984-1987 at ACAT-NY, with Barbara Kent, Judy Leibowitz, Debbie Caplan, Pamela Anderson, Sarnie Ogus, Pearl Ausubel, as well as many others. Perhaps their training program is quite different from what others have experienced, but I remember the question was always "What are you thinking", and not "What are you doing". Is this not what David is describing?

In my own teaching, I might very well tell a student that he shortened and narrowed as he moved into the chair. But I will also immediately ask, "What were you thinking?" I might point out that the student demonstrated his belief that he must make some effort to perform a certain action, and that this belief is, in Alexander's own words, "nothing but a set of tension patterns." Is this not what David is describing?

I also detect a problem in David's distinction between "senses" and "sensory appreciation". If we assume, as David suggests, that the "senses" are accurate but the "student's perception of those senses" is inaccurate, we are then back at a Cartesian duality of mind vs. body, but this time with a poorly-functioning ghost in a well-functioning machine. That at least might be considered new, as it is usually assumed that the ghost is "good" and the machine unruly.

I must confess that I question David's motivations in claiming so many of Alexander's ideas and methods as his own invention. I met David very briefly once, and not in the context of the Alexander Technique, so I cannot say that I have any great insight into the man. However, I am familiar with his involvement in Alexander Technique International, which seems a haven for many who, for whatever reasons, are not part of the Affiliated Societies. His name still appears as the web-master for the ATI website. His name still appears on the list of Sponsoring Members, who alone are qualified to grant teacher status to would-be members (even if the teacher is certified by an Affiliated Society). The last time I checked, the email address alextech@compuserve.com was still registered to David. This all strikes me as strange at best, and hypocritical at worst, for someone who is seeking to

market his own stripped-down version of the Alexander Technique and who no longer calls himself an Alexander teacher. In fact, this all strikes me as another step in what appears to be David's long history of seeing himself as a rebel or outsider in the Alexander community.

Tom Koch, Alextech@direct.a2000.nl, Awareness is free.

Date: Wed, 8 Jul 1998 13:07:42 -0400
From: David Gorman <alextech@compuserve.com>
Cc: Forum_Posting <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Reply to Tom Koch

Tom and List,

Tom Koch wrote on July 7, 1998:

"However, I am familiar with his involvement in Alexander Technique International... ..His name still appears as the web-master for the ATI website... ..The last time I checked, the email address alextech@compuserve.com was still registered to David. This all strikes me as strange at best, and hypocritical at worst, for someone who is seeking to market his own stripped-down version of the Alexander Technique and who no longer calls himself an Alexander teacher."

Well, Tom I must say that I am surprised by your chain of assumptions about me. If you had thought to ask me personally about what was happening with my involvements with ATI and my e-mail address rather than so publicly jumping to conclusions, I would have been happy to explain why I still have these connections AND what I have been doing to end them.

I no longer teach the Alexander Technique but I am still on the Executive Board of ATI serving out the remainder of my 2-year term due to end in November. I have already given my notice that I do not wish to seek re-election (for obvious reasons) and the call for nominations went out to ATI members quite a while ago. Rather than resign immediately, which I have wanted to do several times, I have been persuaded and have been happy to fulfil for the remaining several months the responsibilities I took on when I was elected 2 years ago.

This also goes for the ATI web site where I have given notice near the start of this year that I will not continue after November. ATI is

currently seeking a replacement. I would have changed my e-mail name long ago, but the old ATI web site was hosted on my personal Compuserve web space: (<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/alextech>).

Even though I have set up a new web domain for ATI (on www.ati-net.com) back in April so that I could rename the address, we agreed to leave the old site up for 6 months so that people could still find ATI who did not know the new address. This necessitates me keeping this address until the period is up. Then, believe me, I shall be more than happy to re-name it to something more appropriate.

Koch also wrote:

"However, I am familiar with his involvement in Alexander Technique International, which seems a haven for many who, for whatever reasons, are not part of the Affiliated Societies. His name still appears as the web-master for the ATI website. His name still appears on the list of Sponsoring Members, who alone are "qualified" to grant

teacher status to would-be members (even if the teacher is certified by an Affiliated Society)."

Quite a few members of this list are also members of ATI. Quite a few members of the 'affiliated societies' are also members of ATI. I certainly agree with you that many of them have joined ATI because it seems like a haven for them from some of the experiences they have had at the 'hands' of those in the affiliated societies.

You have been thoroughly misinformed though about the nature of the Sponsoring Members of ATI. The ATI membership has voted to recognize the certifications of all of the affiliated societies. This means that any teacher certificated by any of the affiliated societies can join ATI as a Teaching Member simply by showing their certificate. They do not gain an ATI teaching certificate, but of course they do not need one since they already have one from their original society. The ATI Sponsorship process is only for those who wish to obtain an ATI Teaching Certificate.

I have (so far) remained as a Sponsoring Member because there are still some people training in other Alexander teacher trainings which I have visited and who I have worked with since they began their training. These people have requested that I be one of their Sponsors when they graduate (which is soon for all of them). While I no longer teach the Alexander Technique, I have not 'forgotten' what I know, nor I have I lost the ability to know when someone is a competent teacher. I feel that I can still do this assessment as well as I could before.

I have made it clear to some others who have asked me that I am not going to take on Sponsorship for any people who I have not already been following their progress for some time, so that I can also end this responsibility as soon as possible.

"In fact, this all strikes me as another step in what appears to be David's long history of seeing himself as a rebel or outsider in the Alexander community."

Do you mean the kind of rebel who was instrumental in forming NASTAT and was the chairman of the steering committee who started it? Do you mean the kind of outsider who dreamed up the idea of the affiliated societies in the first place and wrote the bylaws that made them happen? Do you mean the kind of rebel who wrote the certification and membership mechanisms for ATI? If so, then you've certainly got me pegged!

"I must agree with the assessment of others that David has managed to extract some of Alexander's ideas and call them his own. Other than the name of David's "new" technique, I have found absolutely nothing new in David's description of his work... ..I must confess that I question David's motivations in claiming so many of Alexander's ideas and methods as his own invention."

Well, it seems hard to get anywhere on this one. Perhaps I will take another tack.

We have an interesting situation here. It sounds like a bunch of you are happy to accept that I am teaching the Alexander Technique without even seeing me work, while several years ago, I ran into another bunch of teachers who already seemed to consider that I was not teaching the Alexander Technique and they had also not seen me teach. Those who had seen me teach and worked with me were saying how very different it was from their understanding of the work and were urging me to change

the name and get out of the hassles from those who didn't like what I was doing.

In the end, of course, it is my decision and my perception as to what I see as the Alexander work and how different I see what I am doing. It is a constant phenomenon that people who have had Alexander lessons (from all over the world) come and say that this is very different. Equally it is constant that those who have worked with me recently and who then go for Alexander lessons describe the huge difference. You put two and two together.

If the day comes when enough people with Alexander experience come to see what I am doing and most of them say, "yup, that's the Alexander technique", then maybe there'll be no need for a different name. When enough people say that there's no need for any hands-on, no need for movements like sitting and standing, no need for tables or changing any experiences at all, no need to address what is happening physically in the head-neck-back, then I'll agree with Tom and John and all of you--I was always doing the Alexander Technique. But boy, will it have changed!

I think that I have gone with this thread has gone about as far as I can go. I have little more to say without repeating myself. There is nothing more that will prove or disprove anything without meeting any of you in person and sharing experiences as some of you have already proposed.

Nevertheless, if any of you feel differently, I shall be happy to communicate with anyone who sends me a private e-mail about my work or any questions, but I can't see as we are going to get any further with this debate without that next step. I could be wrong, but I'll leave the rest of you to decide for yourselves.

warmly,
David

Date: Tue, 07 Jul 1998 11:21:33 +0100
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: David Langstroth <david@alexandertec.u-net.com>
Subject: inhibiting and directing

Dear everybody,

I have been asked, "How does a student know when they are inhibiting and directing correctly?" The truth is, initially they don't. That is why they come for lessons and that is the skill that they are taught. Through good teaching they learn not to confuse thinking and feeling. We get better and better at it as we learn. Gradually we acquire the skill to change our own conditions.

Best Wishes,
David Langstroth

Date: Tue, 7 Jul 1998 10:35:25 -0500 (CDT)
To: alextech@life.uiuc.edu
From: poised@ix.netcom.com (McCullough)
Subject: inhibiting and directing

List,

"How... does a pupil know when they "have inhibited and directed correctly?"

A student "inhibits and directs correctly" at all times. If the student is sticking to principle, they ARE doing it correctly. The student shouldn't judge whether they are doing it "correctly" or not. Inhibiting and directing (i.e., the Alexander Technique) is a skill; and as with all skills, the skill keeps evolving - we never "arrive".

Brian McCullough, Teacher of the Alexander Technique,
Minneapolis, Minnesota USA

Date: Tue, 7 Jul 1998 18:42:48 +0200
From: "Urban Larsson"
<urban.larsson@nacka.mail.telia.com>
To: <alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu>
Subject: Reply Peter Ruhrbergs reply to Urban

Thank you for the clarification. It certainly helped me to understand a little more about where you are at in your "Alexander" investigations. I had another few questions, but they will have to wait, because we are going away on holiday tomorrow.

best wishes,
Urban

Date: Thu, 9 Jul 1998 10:10:11 +0100 (BST)
From: Linda.Birmingham@brunel.ac.uk
Subject: Thanks everyone and DG's work.
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

Dear all,

I'm am really sad that I haven't had time to follow all these threads. The postings have all been very deep and just reading and contemplating one takes more time than I have available at the moment.

I am so grateful to you all for sharing your experiences with this list, the little I have had time to read has set my own thinking going. Education indeed.

As far as David's work is concerned, it is great that he has shared it with us.

I have been to one day of Davids training course and felt with my debauched feelings and reasoned (with my probably debauched reasoning ;-)) that he has a lot to offer. I did question at the time whether it should still be called the Alexander technique and David agreed at the time that it probably shouldn't.

I am well known not to swallow all the teachings I am fed and David responded to my questioning and not going along with all his statements in a very positive and explorational way. He is an excellent teacher and is teaching his findings.

Many thanks again for all your exquisite postings.

Linda.

Date: Sun, 12 Jul 1998 13:08:36 EDT
From: tvasiliades@juno.com (THOMAS VASILIADES)
To: owner-alextech@life.uiuc.edu
Subject: RE: reality, judging our success or failure, the Gorman Tech

Dear Nina, David G, David L., and the list,

On July 6, Nina Aledort wrote:

"(Tom V.--there are significant differences in how children and adults learn >due to development of the brain through the experience of learning, age, >baggage etc. although they may look similar externally)"

Vygotsky discovered that children learn through the process of performed activity (I cited this in July 1posting on children learning to speak). Their learning (performing as a speaker) preceded their human development (developing into a speaker). Vygotsky discoveries were in human development not simply child development. Nina, it seems to me the reasons you gave for the differences in how children and adults learn doesn't explain how come we cannot perform in adulthood as we did when we were children. It is my understanding that nothing happens to us as we become adults that makes us no longer capable of performance. I think we don't perform in adulthood but not due to incapability. Adult actors perform all the time.

In the performatory approach I have mentioned my students and I create an environment (a zpd - zone for proximal development as Vygotsky called it) for learning and development. It is through the process of performed activity that adults can reinstate development. To create new ways of living life.

Questions for David Gorman on July 6 you wrote:

"It was this pedagogy and the belief systems it implies that I am looking at here. These very teaching techniques only make sense to do from the context of a way of seeing things. When we include the correlation between what is happening in the person's 'use' (in the Alexander sense) and what they are thinking/feeling/doing (from their own point of view), then the way of seeing things CAN change hugely."

I have a question about the correlation you are writing about? Are you saying that there is a specific movement that correlates to what someone is thinking/feeling/doing? For example:If someone is sad are you noticing a collapse in the sternum?are you saying a collapse will always happen when she/he is sad? Can you please clarify?

"It is the teacher's use and skill the pupil experiences rather than their own--this is why a pupil has such different experiences from teachers trained in different ways. What they are experiencing is NOT what 'good use' is like, the pupil is experiencing what it feels like to have a skilled human being devote their entire attention to them with a particular belief system driving it. In other words, they are experiencing the RELATIONSHIP with the teacher. On the other hand, when someone makes the experiment of changing the actions they normally do because of their belief system, they usually feel very different. But it is a difference that cannot possibly be from the physical skill of the teacher since no teacher has been touching them nor in any way proposing a better physical/functional coordination."

Here I think the relationship with the teacher can change the student's belief system. In my opinion, the art of teaching is creating conditions so that students can learn and develop. Even if the teacher does not put hands on during a lesson a students beliefs and use can change. Alexander himself proved that with his discoveries, he didn't have hands on. At this point I'm not advocating hands on or no hands on during a lesson although in my

lessons and classes I am putting hands on less. In my lessons I aim to have the student take a look at their beliefs in how they do things. Our relationship, what we do together, is inseparable from how the student does explores this.

On July 7 David Langstroth wrote

"In all the plans for self-improvement, The Alexander Technique is unique in having an entirely rational criteria for judgement. If you have inhibited and directed correctly then you can judge that you have successfully completed a constructive act towards your self-improvement, no matter what it feels like."

It doesn't seem possible that there can be a rational criteria for judgement of performed human activity. There are a myriad of processes, experiences going on with the teacher and the student. To say that someone is inhibiting and directing (if one is working that way)correctly or incorrectly without including the relationship of the teacher/student leaves out a big part of what would go into making a judgement(if one wanted to). As I've stated in a previous post neither the student or the teacher have the necessary distance to have rational criteria for what I am assuming is ('rational') judgement.

One of the things I find interesting in the work David Gorman has written about is the questioning of students' beliefs, assumption, concepts, whatever you want to call them. I have mentioned in a previous posting my disagreement with his pursuing causality. However, I do find David's going with the beliefs the student is a significant change from Alexander's teaching approach. My understanding of FM's teaching is that the students are going wrong and he is setting them right(I have a disagreement with this duality). As I read it David G. is engaging the beliefs of the student and working with those beliefs. Over the years, I have found in my teaching that the asking of questions can spur the student to think about her/his assumptions and presuppositions. The performance of philosophy, the asking big questions about little things can often open up doors for the student to grow and develop beyond the captivity of their beliefs. One influence on my teaching is Ludwig Wittgenstein, the Austrian philosopher of this. Wittgenstein believed that how we use and understand language (especially language about subjective experiences such as feelings, thoughts, and beliefs) is a source of our pathology. His philosophical undertaking was striving to free us from the mental muddles we get into because we are trying to explain things that do not need explaining. I find that it is necessary to understand language and meaning-not as corresponding to reality, not as "being about " anything, but as human social activity. The student and I are continually making meaning. In the process the students learn how their beliefs of 'use' don't have to be set in stone. They can continually change.

All the best,
Tom Vasiliades

Date: Sun, 12 Jul 1998 22:30:56 -0700
To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

From: Stacy Gehman <stacyg@drizzle.com>
Subject: Reflections on recent postings

Hello to all,

I have read with interest the many postings over the last several weeks, and now have time to contribute my thoughts on some of the many issues raised. I am thinking of all of you as I write, but am responding more particularly to David Gorman. I apologize in advance to those of you who don't like long postings. I can guarantee that it won't happen often.

Several years ago I wrote an article titled "Exploring an Act of Will" for the Journal for Anthroposophy. Because it is not widely available, and because it amplifies what will follow, I will include an excerpt from it in a separate posting. If any of the postings do not arrive intact, please let me know (directly, not through the list) and I will email you directly with an attached document.

Some years ago, I also went through a process similar to the one that you described, David. Except that instead of a student, it was myself that I asked the question "what am I doing?" I had just moved from Lincoln to Seattle, and was really missing regular classes with Marj Barstow. I was actually getting on fairly well, but I knew that I was not making any new progress; that I was not discovering any "whole new realms of delicacy in movement" that Marj occasionally would tell us she had found some particular day. I could apply what I had already learned. I wasn't "falling back." But I realized that I wasn't finding "new realms of delicacy in movement" by myself. I of course tried all sorts of directing and inhibiting and whatever, which sometimes seemed to work for awhile, but fortunately I would end up with a backache or stiff neck, and realize what I was doing.

I finally said to myself "I don't care if I move up, or down, or delicately, or with effort, or right or wrong, or whatever. I just want to know what I am doing." So I sat in a chair, and decided to move forward, and asked myself what I felt myself do. Like your student, I didn't notice my head move or my neck tighten. I did notice my stomach tighten. So, was FM wrong? or was it possible that something happened before I tightened my stomach? So I did it again. Yes, something in my mid-back tightened; oh yes, and also in my upper chest. Was there something before that? So, I did it again, Yes! I tightened my neck! (It took a bit longer than this.) FM really was right, and I could feel it. As soon as I decided to move, I tightened my neck, followed immediately by chest, back, stomach, and, oh yes, I pull my legs in towards me. By guiding my observations with Alexander's basic concept my observations became more precise, because it led me to continually question what I was feeling. I was/am not attempting to use my feelings as a guide, but am using my thinking to guide my feeling. The rest of this story can be found in my paper published in the Proceedings of the Engelberg Alexander Congress, available from Directions, I believe, and also found in a different form in the paper I will post. In contrast to the above, I have described our usual way (frankly, including "directing") of going about doing something as reaching back into the past for what to do, hurling it into the future, and then hoping to catch up with it somewhere. Very similar to the way David describes it.

Perhaps because my initial questioning was about myself instead of a student, I was not willing to ascribe my unobserved habitual response to some other demon living in me. I knew I had to own those movements, so I could finally have a chance to inhibit them, and then to surprise myself in doing an activity so delicately that if I had not conceived it and given consent, I wouldn't know I was doing it. I don't claim that I continually live in that state, or that it is perfection in movement, but it is a nice way to "tune up my instrument" once in awhile. I do believe that the process I have called "consciously guided observation" in the two papers I referenced above is really pretty much the process FM described in the "Evolution of a Technique," but you do have to read between the lines. Think a bit about what it means to "analyze the conditions of use present" and to "make the experience of receiving a stimulus to speak and of refusing to do anything immediately in response." What I describe above is "analyzing the conditions," and is the only way I have found to really know I have done the second. Otherwise either I haven't really "made the experience," or I haven't really refused to do anything, because I wouldn't KNOW whether I had done anything or not. I also believe it is similar to FM's process, because after I "discovered" this way of working, I realized that I had seen Marj guide many people through lessons in much the same way, without using her hands, but much more artfully than my somewhat analytical approach. But then I'm an engineer, not a dancer. Marj never claimed to do anything with her students except to help them "explore Alexander's discoveries."

As to all the controversy in the Alexander Technique world, I believe that two concepts have wreaked havoc with our understanding of the work, and with our relationships to each other. One is the notion that our habits are "unconscious," and the other is the concept of conditioned response as the way we learn the Technique.

"Unconscious" in the classical psychological sense means "that which can not be made conscious," at least that's what a psychologist told me. Some sense of that meaning is operating in what you (David) wrote in the first part of your post. I don't believe we have any such habits. I believe people are continually making decisions. When we've made a particular decision a few times, with apparently successful results, we forget the reasons for the decision, but link the conditions that lead to the decision with the result of our thinking (the decision). It appears to save a lot of time. Now the thinking that lead to the decision may be thorough, or sloppy, or I may choose to accept somebody else's thinking instead of doing my own. But I make the decision. And then forget about it, and may even be led to believe I have a conditioned habit because I have forgotten the reasons for what I am doing. This seems very different than ascribing the pulling down to something unconscious, outside myself. I don't deny that we have a good many reflexes that are outside of our consciousness. They are part of our heritage as human beings. They are what will "do" all of the marvelous things we want to do if we will have a clear conception, get out of the way, and give consent. (An aside: Don Weed (a chiropractor/Alexander teacher) convinced me some years ago that when injuries are present, not all of our reflexive/natural processes act in our best long term

interest. That is why we still need therapies in addition to the Alexander Technique.)

As for learning the Technique by being conditioned to associate the giving of directions with the new experience provided by the teacher, I never liked that idea since my first teacher (not Marj) explained it to me. I liked what she was showing me, but not that explanation of how I would learn it. When I met Marj, I had a teacher who wanted me to think, question, be awake, and take responsibility for my learning. The conditioned response idea of how we learn requires us to believe in a direct transmission from the hands of the teacher to the student. As such, because we have all gotten tremendous, in some cases life saving, benefits from our own teacher, we believe that our own teacher must have gotten the true transmission. To the extent that someone else does something different, they must be very suspicious characters. If we will only throw out that model of learning, we can separate the principles Alexander discovered from how we teach them, thereby allowing each other to explore our own ways to teach, disagreeing with and learning from each other.

But... David, if you no longer believe, nor teach your students, that there is something about the relationship of your whole head to your whole body that is in some way a controlling factor in how you coordinate and perceive yourself in activity, then I agree that you do not teach the Alexander Technique. All the other stuff, end gaining, inhibition, means whereby, directing, table work, chair work, working in activities, hands-on work, working in groups, are all just sometimes helpful ways of negotiating the pitfalls one can find along the way to exploring that one basic idea. If you have abandoned that idea, then I suggest you might test it for yourself one more time. Being a physicist/engineer for some 35 years, I have been naturally suspicious of this touchy/feely stuff, and have on many occasions, looked at myself and said "all this stuff is a bunch of crap." But a little voice would say "OK, test it out." I would pick an activity, ready to chuck the whole Alexander thing if I couldn't convince myself of its worth. That one idea has always come out shining.

I will close with a quote from Trevelyan's diary, Dec. 8, 1933. I have been reading it over and over for the last couple of years.

F.M. said "*We work to undo something and to feel out what change can be made. If we know beforehand what we are going to do we are lost. If the pupil does the thinking he will not slip back quite to the point he was before. But the trouble is none of my pupils will believe that all they need do is to THINK and that wish for the neck to be free will do the trick. I could now with my hands make any alteration in anyone, but none will trust to the thought. We are so brutalised by our belief in doing and muscular tension.*"

Date: Sun, 12 Jul 1998 23:04:56 -0700

To: alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu

From: Stacy Gehman <stacyg@drizzle.com>

Subject: Excerpt from "Exploring an Act of Will"

The following has been adapted from an article titled "*Exploring an Act of Will*" published in "*Journal for Anthroposophy*," Winter 1995, by Stacy Gehman (206) 368-8544

(The introductory sections introduced who F.M. Alexander was, and why I thought anthroposophists might be interested.)

Some Ideas About How We Are Organized

Several years ago I asked a particularly sensitive and thoughtful student what he had noticed about a movement he had just done. He replied that he noticed a lot of things, and proceeded to list some of them. He wanted to know what was important. How was he to prioritize his observations, to find meaning in them? His question helped me see the importance of Alexander's discoveries in consciously organizing our observations and actions.

There are three ideas that I use to guide the observation of a willed movement. The first two that I will discuss come from physiology and concern the way our senses are organized. I think Alexander was intuitively aware of both of these ideas, although he did not state them explicitly. If we think a bit about our experiences, I think we can all verify them for ourselves. First, all our senses are relatively poor at determining the absolute, or objective level of any stimulus. What we are better organized for is detecting a change. When a constant stimulus is applied to one of our senses, the response seen in our nervous system is one of rapid firing immediately after the stimulus is applied, followed by a decreasing firing rate as the stimulus is maintained. This seems like a pretty good way to be organized - something which is changing is much more interesting, and potentially more important, to me than something which is unchanging. As an example of the way we experience this physiological fact, think about walking into a cold lake - the sensation at the part of our body that is just getting wet is almost unbearable, but the part that has been wet awhile is actually comfortable. The way we judge absolute levels (e.g. temperatures, relative positions of various parts of our bodies, etc.) is by remembering, in some way 'summing up', all the changes that got us there.

If what we experience of the world is the way it is changing, one important question is "how small a change can I notice?" The second physiological fact that I use to guide my observation is that my sensitivity to a change in a stimulus is proportional to the absolute level of the stimulus present. For example, in a dimly lit room I would notice the addition of a single candle, but in a sunlit room I would not be able to see a change in the level of lighting due to one candle. In an objective sense, the amount of light added is the same in both cases, but our ability to see the change in the level of light is very different.

These two ideas can already suggest an approach to finding out how we do something. The first suggests that we look at what changes when we go from one activity to another, when the contrast is greatest. The second suggests that we look at the beginning of the new movement before the level of stimulus is so great that we are unable to observe subtle changes. As I suggested earlier, we might observe going from standing to walking, stopping as soon as we know we are moving. Alexander began his explorations by observing his ordinary speaking, then looked for a difference when he began to recite. The three changes that he observed, pulling his head back, depressing his larynx and sucking in his breath, all happened before he made the first sound of his sentence. After observing these things as he began to recite, he could then see that he was also doing them to a smaller

degree in his ordinary speaking, that is, he became more sensitive in his observation.

With enough persistent experimentation and precision of observation, I think that, proceeding in the way outlined above, anyone could discover the third idea for themselves, the idea that is really the core of Alexander's discoveries. When beginning to observe themselves in activity, most people will notice an enormous variety of things going on within themselves that were previously overlooked. How are we to make sense of all the things we now observe? What is important? If I want to make a change in my habitual way of doing something, where should I start? Alexander spent years observing himself in activity to answer these questions. What he discovered is an organizing principle of our use of ourselves, which he called the primary control.

On its surface it is almost absurdly simple: the changing relationship of my head to my body is the controlling factor in the way I coordinate any activity in which I engage, and in the way I perceive myself and the world around me. It is a "universal constant in living," as Alexander entitled one of his books. This constant influence operates to my disadvantage if I tighten my neck and pull my head closer to my body, and to my advantage if my neck is free so that my head can delicately and subtly move (relative to my body) throughout my actions. This change in the relationship of my head to my body is something I am actually doing every moment of (at least) my waking life, whether I know it or not. If I do know it, I at least have a chance to find a new, more coordinated way of action, one that can be free of the domination by habit. If I don't know it, the odds are good that I'll start by tightening my neck, thereby setting up an adverse reaction throughout my self that actually impedes the achievement of my intended goal. We do not perceive this interference with ourselves directly. Instead we usually interpret what is actually an active (although unnoticed) interference as the effort we feel necessary to overcome gravity and inertia. We usually respond to this perceived effort in one of two ways, frequently alternating between them. We either decide to brace ourselves, to master this unwilling flesh, and push our way through to accomplish our ends, or we give up the struggle, slump, and drag ourselves around doing what we have to. We usually admire the one, and pity the other, but in either case the root cause of the trouble is left unchanged and unnoticed. It is my old habits of thought and deep seated fears that are manifested in my ambivalence toward my actions. They are manifested through tightening of my neck and body, and are felt as resistance to my actions that must be overcome by effort. As I remove this internal resistance to my actions, my doing becomes more wholehearted, and seemingly effortless. Any sense of effort that I feel as necessary to accomplish an activity (within the limits of my physical capability), even to push a piano, has proven to be unnecessary when I have examined the activity closely. (I don't mean to imply that my muscles don't need to work, or that I never get tired. It's just that the part of the activity that I identify as my effort is unnecessary.) If my conception of the activity is clear, if my desire to accomplish it is real, then, as Alexander would say, I need only give consent - anything else is extra. If I feel an effort, it is really there asking me to acknowledge my misconceptions and ambivalence. It is a lifelong challenge,

one that applies to any activity, not just those that are usually considered physical, and it is actually fun.

In the next section I will guide you through a process that you can use to explore some of these notions on your own.

Consciously Guided Observation

I have guided many people through the process that I will describe here, and although my approach is essentially the same in all cases, in practice everyone is different in what they notice and what they don't, so that the questions I ask and the suggestions I offer are different for everyone. Nevertheless I hope to explain it here in a way that will help you ask yourself questions and discover your own possibilities. I would be very happy if anyone who tries this would write me with their experiences.

Let's look at what happens when we take a step. Really we could choose any activity, to sit down, stand up, sing a song, jump, put a bow to a string, turn a screwdriver, etc, but for now let's stay with taking a step. The first thing that I would like you to notice is how you have thought about what you are about to do. Did you try to remember what you do to take a step, or to figure out what you must have done? Instead I suggest actually doing it. Go ahead and take a step, then ask yourself "what happened?" If you're not sure what happened, do it again, but be sure you are really just standing there first. Sometimes simply going back to standing requires very clearly saying to yourself, "No, I am not going to take a step. I am just standing here." If you find you've made a little preparatory movement because you think you know you need to do that anyway, and you can notice yourself doing it, then you are well on the road to finding out how your habitual response to taking a step begins. In fact standing quietly, knowing that in a moment you are going to take a step, but doing nothing in response, can be an interesting challenge in directing one's will. It is the beginning of what Alexander called inhibition, and is necessary to finding out what your habitual response is. Some consider this consciously willed inhibition of an immediate, habitual response to be Alexander's most important discovery, because it is this that allows room for a new way of doing to be discovered.

While you are standing there, are you standing absolutely still, or can you notice very slight little movements of your head, neck, torso and legs? Those movements are the natural movements you do to maintain balance. Can you see how those little movements respond to your breathing, perhaps even to the beating of your heart? Movement of the various parts of our body relative to each other is necessary to balance. It really is amazing what all is going on all the time that we never need to bother ourselves about. There is no way that I can help along that process of balancing by tightening something up or holding on to my legs, for example. I can only get in its way. The best thing I can do is to begin to notice how I do get in its way, and stop. This goal, of finding out how I am interfering with the easy, natural functioning of myself, so that I can have a choice to stop interfering, underlies all of the Alexander Technique. Our more usual approach, of identifying an end, and being concerned primarily with gaining that end, Alexander termed "end-gaining."

Now that we have gotten this far, go ahead and start to take another step. What did you notice? Did your body lurch a bit? Did you notice some part of your body become

more rigid, or a tightening of some muscle or group of muscles? My experience has shown me that most people notice something in their legs, back or abdomen first. Alexander's discovery of the primary control, however, would lead us to expect there also to be a change in the relationship of our heads to our bodies. Did you notice your head move, or your neck tighten a bit? Most people do not notice that change at first because the other changes are much bigger.

So, let's take another step. Please don't forget to really enjoy just standing for awhile before you start the step. This time catch yourself as soon as you know you have moved in response to the decision to take a step. Did you notice yourself tighten your neck? If not, start again, always going back to standing for a moment first. No matter what is noticed in response to deciding to move, it seems always possible to wonder about what happened just before that.

There are a couple of things that can get in the way of this process. One is the notion that there is a right way to take a step, or a right way to do anything, for that matter. Oddly enough, worrying about the right way to do something, or even thinking I know the right way to do something, can actually prevent me from seeing what I am really doing. Because there are myriad sensations that accompany any activity, if I am worried that I am not doing it right, I can always find something that feels wrong. If I think I know the right way, I can always find some sensation to prove to me that I have done it right. If I really want to know what I am doing, I have found it best to forget my preconceived notions about what is the right or wrong way to do it. On the other hand it is possible to prefer one way of doing something to another, after the alternatives have been experienced.

With that bit of attention to possible obstacles done, let's get back to taking a step.

When you get to the point that you can actually feel yourself tightening your neck as you begin to take a step, observe how a wave of tightening quickly proceeds from your neck down through your body as you begin to take the step. Repeat this a couple of times, always going back to standing quietly in between repetitions. Observe the direction that your head and body move in response to the tightening. In particular observe whether it is upward or downward. Because muscles shorten when they tighten in response to my decision to take a step, they in a sense pull the parts of my body down and together (i.e. towards each other) as I start to move. Even the excess tension associated with what is called "standing up straight" actually pulls the upper part of my back backwards and down towards the lower part of my back. If the tension you have discovered associated with taking a step doesn't feel like it is pulling you down, try out this alternative way of thinking about it, and see if it makes sense. If it does, does the way you feel the movement change?

When what you are doing becomes clear to you, you can ask yourself if that wave of tightening is really necessary. It usually feels absolutely necessary, if you want to take a step, but it really isn't. When you become conscious of tightening your neck, you begin to have a choice about doing it, but how can you not do something that feels absolutely necessary and still take the step? Another idea, and a spirit of adventure are a big help.

So far you have observed what has happened when you proceeded from standing to beginning to take a step. Then you went back to standing quietly. What happens when you decide not to continue to take the step, but instead to go back to standing? Chances are you didn't notice, but you can always repeat the experiment. Did the tension associated with taking the step go away when you went back to standing? What direction did your parts move when you returned to standing? Was it an effortless movement upward to standing? If not, are you doing anything different now because you are observing the process of returning to standing? If observing it did change it, or you don't know, well, forget about it, take a break, and start back at the beginning when you feel like it. In fact I don't suggest anyone spend more than 5 minutes in this whole process. If you notice at any point that you are getting stiff or have an ache or pain, then I suggest a break, and forgetting about it for awhile. This process isn't about learning to do anything right. It is about learning to observe ourselves as lightly and simply as possible.

When students do observe the downward pull associated with taking the step, and the easy, upward return to standing, they usually prefer the latter feeling. The usual tension associated with standing may not be any different, but the easy movement back to standing is really pretty nice compared to the contraction associated with beginning to take a step. If in your experiments you have gotten this far, then the next suggestion is to ask yourself if that easy, upward feeling of movement could continue while you take a step. Put another way, could you continue with what you felt when giving up taking a step while taking a step nevertheless? It will likely feel impossible, but, just for fun, consider the possibility anyway. If it doesn't feel impossible, you might want to be a little suspicious of what you're doing. You're not doing anything right are you?

Another suggestion that I have found helpful at this point is to think of beginning the movement of taking the step by allowing your head to tilt very slightly forward, a direction that, if it were to continue, would have you looking toward your feet. Let this tilt of your head happen because you released tension somewhere in your neck, and let it take you slightly off of your balance. As you try this, if you make the tilt of your head so small you barely know you have done it, then you won't end up looking down, especially if you remember to continue with that easy, upward movement through your body. You continue with that easy, upward movement by simply not interfering with it. You actually have to do something to stop it, and virtually anything you actively do will stop it. So, if you forget what that easy, upward movement is like, or if you find yourself tugging at your head to make it tilt, you can always go back a few paragraphs and begin again. You really can't make happen that easy upward movement in the same way you are used to making other movements happen. It only comes as the result of releasing the downward pressure habitually associated with the movement. The slight forward tilt of your head, and projecting (by deciding to continue it, even if it feels odd) the easy, upward movement of your body allow you to continue to inhibit your habitual response to taking a step, and nevertheless to take the step in a new way that can only be discovered as it happens.

When you are able to begin the step while continuing the easy, upward movement and the slight forward tilt of your

head, if you did nothing else you would fall on your face. Instead allow one of your legs to move by moving your knee forward so that your foot comes down under you. I suggest starting with some baby steps, perhaps allowing your fingertips to rest lightly on a table top or the back of a chair to aid your balance. I really can't tell you much more about what to expect as you continue to walk - it always seems new to me. And when you come back to standing after the step, observe how different that might be from your usual way of standing. I hope you have some fun.

I usually suggest that people not spend more than 5 minutes at a time working this way. If you find yourself feeling stiff or having aches and pains, consider that it might be your body's way of telling you that you are trying to tell it something right to do instead of observing what is happening, and discovering something new. When I guide a student through this process in a class it usually takes about 15 minutes, so if you are working alone, I suggest spreading out these experiments over a few days. As you become familiar with the process, you can go through the whole thing in a second or two. I find it great entertainment while waiting for the bus or in a grocery store check out line. The movements are so small that no one will notice what you are doing. Then when the bus comes or it's your turn in line, take off, and let yourself be surprised about what happens, and what you observe.

Before I conclude, I would like to explain how the ideas presented earlier about how we are organized are used in the process outlined above. First, we decided to look at what changed when we went from standing to taking a step. Second, we progressively made ourselves more sensitive to the movement by asking ourselves to look closer and closer to the beginning of the movement. Third, Alexander's idea of the primary control told us not to stop looking for the beginning of the movement until we knew what happened to the relationship of our heads to our bodies, i.e. until we could actually feel what happened in our necks. It is really this third idea that allows the process to become objective. And finally, in directing the movements of our heads and bodies in a new way as we took the step, we asked that the movement we used to initiate the step be as close to effortless as perceivable, so small that we barely knew we did it.

Conclusions

By working in the way outlined in the last section, I believe that we are directing our attention to what is actually observable through a human body, that is, change. We gradually return our attention to the undifferentiated stream of flowing perception. Other ways of talking about movement, such as paying attention to good posture, proper alignment, just relaxing, or images of strings tied to our heads can sometimes be useful for motivating or encouraging people to change. However, they all rely on an enormous number of preexisting thought patterns that can color our perceptions of what we are actually doing, and that impose prejudgements on our experience. By returning to what we can actually perceive, we have a chance to make fresh choices about what we think and do, free from preexisting conditions.

As you review the experiences you had following the consciously guided observation procedure, how would you describe the change in consciousness that accompanied coming closer and closer to observing the moment that

you initiated movement? When you were able to continue with the step while your habitual response remained inhibited, who was observing the movement, thinking the directions, willing the movement? In my experience, at that moment, all three processes blend into one. I don't think I could discriminate thinking, feeling and willing into separate processes at that moment. As I begin to objectively observe my thinking, feeling and willing, I begin to dissociate them from 'I' experiences - i.e. if I am not my thinking, feeling and/or willing, because I am observing and directing them as they happen, then what does that leave? I don't know, but it's not nothing, and it's no thing I can point to.

If you review the process you went through, or if you do it again, notice that what you start out feeling about a movement is by no means what you end up feeling, i.e. your initially perceived feelings were not accurate (and never will be). Also observe that you were willing movements without being aware of it, so that the thoughts that led to the movements were unobserved, as were the movements themselves. The habitual responses were determined by past experience, with no choice on your part as long as they remained unobserved. The consciously guided observation process uses thinking, feeling and willing in an iterative process that continually moves the three closer and closer to being observed at the same time, the moment the new movement begins.

Our habitual responses are usually unobserved while they are happening. In a sense we become partially unconscious during them. Therefore, the processes of thinking, feeling and willing appear to be separated. We appear to ourselves to first think about the movement, then do it, then feel the result of moving. That moment of becoming unconscious, while we tighten our bodies to "get ready to move," causes us to be unable to observe the unity of thinking, feeling, and of will acting into us.

As we are able to extend our consciousness more fully over more of our activities, we become less bound by our conditioned habits of thinking and doing, and are more able to gain access to new responses that more appropriately fit the moment.

The 'official' public debate ended here. The remaining material was sent to me later on by people reading the debate on my web site:

Date: 10 Oct 1998, 14:30pm
To: "David Gorman" 100653.2057@compuserve.com
From: Nicholas Brockbank dod@dodman.freemove.co.uk
Subject: Contribution

Hi,

Is it David Gorman reading this? I was trawling through the lengthy debate on the Direction web site but when I got to the end was disappointed to find it had fizzled out. Is that it or have I missed how these things operate? I wrote a small contribution but I don't know where by sending it to Alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu it ends up.

Cheers, Nicholas

Date: 10/10/98 17:28 PM

To: Nicholas Brockbank, dod@dodman.freemove.co.uk
From: David Gorman alextech@compuserve.com
Subject: Re: Contribution

Hi Nicholas,

This IS David Gorman replying. Yes, I agree it did somewhat fizzle out in the public discussion. I was disappointed by the calibre of discussion and the degree of personal attacks. As you may know several of the people who were vehement in this debate have since been banned from the alextech list for attacking others.

As you read near the end of that debate, I wrote that I had said all that I had to say without just endlessly repeating myself so I bowed out of the public discussion inviting any who wanted to carry on to contact me privately. Aside from repeating myself, the other main reason for ending my participation was that so much of the debate was becoming about the validity of my new work and not about the premises of the AT work. I didn't want to continue any such discussion with people who had no experience of my work. There would seem to be little point in that...

Fortunately, there were quite a few people who did want to carry on discussing, but unfortunately, this was privately, not publically.

I'd love to hear your contribution to the debate. If you want to, you can send it to me at this e-mail address (100653.2057@compuserve.com). I don't know if any new material can be added to the existing debate--you'd have to contact Jeremy Chance who runs the direction site [Ed. note: this refers to the posting of this debate on the direction journal site--parts 1-12 of the above in the same format--www.directionjournal.com/alextech.].

If you send your reply to the alextech@pop.life.uiuc.edu it will go out to the current subscribers of the Alextech list but will not automatically be added to the debate.

warmly,
David

Date: Sun, 11 Oct 1998

To: "David Gorman" 100653.2057@compuserve.com

From: Nicholas Brockbank c/o

dod@dodman.freemove.co.uk

Subject: Contribution

David,

Thanks for replying. I suppose the debate did get a little over personal, although obviously there's a lot of history behind this I don't know about; but 'heated' discussions always tend to be a bit fruitless in terms of actually exploring ideas.

What I wanted to say wasn't so much to you as an individual, though it seemed to centre round your work, as to anyone who was interested in the issue of what the Technique is, what it does and how it does it; but I'm sending you my thoughts as I would have thrown them into the debate, anyway.

The only problem with this is it makes me sound rather impersonal towards you, as if you are a third party figure. Of course, you would be if this was just something for anyone to read. So, please bear that in mind.

BEGINNING

Reading through the contributions to this long debate, a number of issues strike me. The most prominent is the question of the Primary Control.

Either this, or what is meant by it, exists or else it doesn't. If it doesn't, fair enough, those who believe in it are fooling themselves; but if it does, then it exists in everyone regardless of belief.

If the Primary Control is a fact, and if interference with it debilitates us in the way Alexander suggested, believing we can only improve matters by stopping that interference shouldn't mean dismissing out of hand any possibility of doing so other than through our fairly limited definition of inhibition and direction. All approaches that engage us as human beings and bring about beneficial changes in use - even if this is incidental to their intention - must not only be worthwhile (from an Alexandrian point of view) but ought positively to be encouraged.

I'm sure I'm not alone in having seen, marvelling and despairing in equal measure, massive - and I mean, huge - changes in use taking place in Alexander students after they have attended some non-Alexandrian workshop that had no pretensions to doing any such thing.

On this basis, I have no problems whatsoever making comparisons and seeing connections between the Alexander Technique and other approaches, whether they are therapies or disciplines. Alexandrian attention may be more directly tuned to doing away with interference, but that is not to say NLP, or Yoga, or Creative listening, or even intra-family cuddling - especially on as prolonged and repetitious a basis as people are expected to have Alexander lessons - won't do something similar. Ours is only one approach among many. The major difference is that we like to think we are working consciously towards better use as a goal; but we all know how easily this can be confused with rigidity.

That was the question David Langstroth started this debate off with. Then everyone seemed to forget about it and go off at a tangent to discuss David Gorman's new way of teaching. This brings me to my second point, which concerns use.

I had always thought that what Alexander meant by use incorporated a person's state of mind and body. Presumably, since he equated muscle tension with character, he believed he could 'read' one from the other. This, after all, was the basis for his stance on psychophysical unity.

I find David Gorman's insistence that the 'real' person - what he calls "the conscious human being" - acts separately from (in his description, going "way out ahead of") his or her "body", leaving 'it' to somehow sort itself out, decidedly odd, even allowing for the fact he no longer claims to teach the Technique. The implication that our mental state, consisting of what we are conscious of, is somehow more authentic than what 'it' doesn't know the rest of the self is doing, seems unnecessarily divisive.

Surely, it is not only in Alexandrian terms that the self includes everything? We are indivisible, mind permeating body. I don't think any useful distinction can be made between the aspect of use that is thought and the aspect that is muscular, since they are essentially one and the same.

The sole rationale for making such a distinction would be on the level of intervention. David's way of working, as he describes it, is based on his and his student's perception of their mental state, which when subtly altered, produces gratifying though not directly sought after physical changes; but why this should be any more surprising than the reverse effect of a changed mental state being brought about through the physical touch of a teacher's hands, which Alexander teacher's lived with for years, I can't imagine.

David's main contribution here is obviously not the reiteration of one of Alexander's most basic insights - the phenomenon of endgaining - but his discovery of a means for ameliorating this without the need for touch, as well as, apparently, doing away with the concomitant requirement for endless repetition of lessons. This is a huge development, the truly "explosive" nature of what he proposes - always assuming it works!

As for whether or not what he is teaching is the Alexander Technique, I think Stacey Gehman put David's current position clearly. If David believes in the Primary Control as he describes it and is knowingly working towards stopping interference with that (and if, I might add, he believes this leads to conscious - ie, individual - control over the same process) then, yes, he is teaching the Technique, albeit in a radically different way. If, as I suspect, he has lost faith in the existence of a Primary Control, but prefers to work with the unspecified concept of allowing general use to improve through an indirect, hands-off approach, then I would say he is teaching something else.

Nevertheless, from the way David describes his session with the violinist, and from the way Peter Ruhberg later describes his more traditional (in a hands-on sense) lesson with the ironist, I have to conclude that David's approach is markedly more indirect and in keeping with the notion that something in us that is unknown and largely unknowable will put us right so long as the rest of us gets out of its way.

If that makes what Peter is doing 'not the Alexander Technique', then perhaps we should be thinking of redefining it rather than expecting everyone who doesn't adhere to strict principle (neck first, all else follows) to branch off on their own.

Incidentally, concerning the ironist, I am surprised David should tell Peter that his student "didn't know about the third degree of mobility in the shoulder joint before you told her". I would have thought she almost certainly did, in exactly the way I know about it, without having a clue what it means - unconsciously, from early learning experiences. Their only difference (David and Peter's) lies in how they might remind her (and me) of what had earlier in life been obvious.

David suggests that what he is doing is too far removed from the current general consensus to be comfortably included within the mainstream. He doesn't say so but I can readily imagine a moderator from a traditional training course, where hands-on work predominates in relative silence - or even noisy abandon - but where without a chair or a couch nothing much would be expected to happen, having problems authenticating people from David's course. Besides, why should he or his students want to be so authenticated?

If David's approach works, if the Primary Control exists, it will be happening on that level anyway, in which case his insights should eventually be incorporated into the traditional Alexander means; if the Primary Control doesn't exist, but some other, inherent internal wisdom does, which his approach helps elicit, then "LearningMethods" will come into its own, while the Alexander Technique either fades away, bereft of its central thesis, or becomes the pre-eminent system for purely postural improvement it often looks like doing anyway. If David's approach doesn't work, or doesn't work sufficiently often or well, it will presumably die a natural enough death.

This leads me to the tricky question of whether the specific approach David describes - which, I am happy to acknowledge, I cannot properly comment on without having experienced - sounds realistic. Initially, we have to go by what we are told, just as my first Alexander lesson only came after I had digested all that I could find out about the subject.

My biggest problem with LearningMethods is David's rather too simplistic offering of "being present in the moment" as the universal panacea. Please, don't get me wrong. I happen to believe, and have believed for some time, that this is the universal panacea. The difficulty is putting it into practice.

Assuming we we are born 'present', in a unified state of consciousness of both mind and body (with or without a Primary Control that lies at the heart of such consciousness) as we grow up, whether through the effects of civilisation or as the inevitable result of our human nature, our instinctive impulses are overruled by the requirement for reasoned decision making. Insidiously, as this area of our consciousness grows more dominant, it becomes decreasingly aware of what it is dominating.

I see this as the creation of what we call our conscious mind (David's "conscious human being") which is where 'we' reside; beneath it (constituting David's "body") a subconscious - made up, in simplistic terms, of learned behaviour - forms, leaving the instinctive remainder largely unconscious.

Obviously, this is a personal view; but I believe 'present moment living' only takes place when the edges between these three aspects of our consciousness blur sufficiently to enable no such distinctions to be made. This is as it was at birth, becoming less so as we grow older.

In adulthood, we find individuals are rarely fully present. I don't think this is any exaggeration. The majority of us most of the time are somewhere else: generally, reflecting on the past or anticipating the future; or isolated in a vacuum of non-time, exactly as I am now, writing these words

This absence from 'now' is pretty much continual; and although it may on the surface seem an exclusively mental predisposition, from an Alexandrian point of view our bodies are there with us - in the imaginary past or future, or 'out of time'. No part of us is really present.

For me, Alexander work has been, first and foremost, a superb means for returning to where I am. I firmly believe 'being here now' is our natural state; but because of the enormous effort we have expended over the years to get away from it (as an example, think what has led to our

being able to contribute to this debate, in terms of abstraction) it's not so easy getting back.

Of course, the ability to reflect is the human condition. It's what separates us from animals. In fact, it's all that separates us from animals. I believe as a species we have overdone this, and that we should endeavour to find a way back to moment-to-moment living, at least occasionally, so that for some of the time we can return to full consciousness.

Alexandrian attention to, and awareness of, the self, which by definition engages us both physically and mentally (you can't be aware of the body other than through the mind, and you can't attend to the self - at least, in waking life - other than through the body) has enabled me to spend a lot more time - I'm talking of minutes, here, rather than nanoseconds - in the present than any number of alternative approaches.

I've been working on this for years. Not professionally, but off and on, along with trying to become more reasonable, loving, charitable, etc. Nothing ever seemed to work to get me even momentarily 'out of my head' (a telling expression, when you think about it) except excitement or fear. That was, until I came upon the Technique. Even with this, it took me years to realise that what I wanted was not what the majority of teachers were endeavouring to sell me; but that's another story.

All this might help explain why I am intrigued to know what exactly happens to David and his students when they are "present in the moment". Or even how they know when that is. What, after all, is their awareness of it? I am also keen to know what David believes happens to the use of those who have made 'present moment living' the study of their lives. My knowledge of these things is shaky but I assume Buddhists and others (including, presumably, all mediators) have an interest in this.

Intriguingly, I am reminded of Arthur Janov, originator of Primal Therapy, whose studies of advanced 'be here now' enthusiasts - many of religious persuasion - showed that however calm their brain patterns appeared to be, their bodies were bundles of repressed muscular tension. How he measured this, I don't know. Nor do I know what his results say for psychophysical unity. I do think, though, that it's probably a fallacy to imagine the 'present moment' is necessarily going to be tranquil.

If David has some new insights into ways of being "present in the moment", particularly how to enter this state at will, and remain there for longer than it takes to reflect on it; and if he is willing to share those insights, I for one would be extremely grateful to him.

Thanks for reading this,

Nicholas Brockbank.

END

All that was said, David, in the knowledge that actual experience of your work is the only way I'll ever get to understand it. You may remember me writing to ask if I could visit your London training course in its final weeks and you ringing to give me some possible dates. This was after Adam Nott mentioned to me you had evolved a 'new' approach.

To my regret, I didn't pursue your offer. I have a complicated fear and loathing for training courses,

primarily associated with the perceived disparity between the personal use and the nature of the hands-on work a visitor presents needing to conform to that pertaining on the course, and Alexander's exhortation to teach any way but the way he did. Had I known you had abandoned hands-on work altogether, it might have been different!

Nicholas.

Date: 02/11/98 02:07 PM

To: Nicholas Brockbank, dod@dodman.freemove.co.uk

From: David Gorman, deegee@learningmethods.com

RE: re: Contribution from Nicholas Brockbank

Nicholas,

At long last I have a few moments to reply...

I cannot reply to every bit of what you have written, but there are a few things that I would like to say. I've appended your text then my replies below.

The main reason why I'm not going to respond to everything is that words cannot convey much here. I realized this anew with this whole debate. It is impossible and undesirable to try to put what I do in words when it is so much easier to see and understand directly in person. You are welcome at any workshop, where I'm sure what I was saying will be a million times more understandable. You can find a list of upcoming dates and places at my web site (www.learningmethods.com). It looks now that there will be another 1 or 2 weeks in London in February or March of 1999.

I too am sorry that you didn't come to visit the school back then. I felt that I went out on quite a limb (given the attitude of various colleagues and my so-called professional association, STAT) to call Adam Nott and share with him what I had discovered. I was profoundly disappointed that he didn't come to see for himself what I was doing (our meeting was short enough that it was mainly discussing the discoveries but not showing them). I was also disappointed that no one else from STAT came on their own steam to see until they were accusing me of not teaching the Technique at which point I did not want anyone with that pre-conceived attitude anywhere near my school and I refused to allow them in the door. All of this was instrumental in me resigning from STAT. And of course had its good side as it moved me toward going off on my own work a lot sooner than I might have otherwise.

I would suggest that you do post your contribution to the Alextech Forum. Perhaps make a note at the start that it is rather late in coming back but people who want to refer back to the debate can look it up at the direction site at (www.directionjournal.com/alextech.html), and maybe suggesting that this contribution be added to the debate. I will choose at that point whether to respond to the list or not. The original debate period served its purpose for me to put forward where I was. I can't see much point in trading more words with anyone who has not actually experienced my work. I have an e-mail discussion group, the LearningMethods Forum, like the alextech list where we do discuss all aspects of the work, but it is a private list only for those with experience of the work.

Now to your contribution:

You wrote:

"The most prominent is the question of the Primary Control. Either this, or what is meant by it, exists or else it doesn't. If it doesn't, fair enough, those who believe in it are fooling themselves; but if it does, then it exists in everyone regardless of belief. If the Primary Control is a fact, and if interference with it debilitates us in the way"

I certainly do see that some sort of coordinating integrating mechanism or function exists in us, whether or not we'd call it the Primary Control and whether or not it has much to do with the head/neck/back relationship. Something certainly seems to coordinate and organize us when we get out of the way and cease to try to organize ourselves in any way. This goes for daily living, moving functions as well as totally new learned coordinations (e.g. violin playing). As you put it: "the notion that something in us that is unknown and largely unknowable will put us right so long as the rest of us gets out of its way. "

You also wrote:

"I find David Gorman's insistence that the 'real' person - what he calls "the conscious human being" - acts separately from (in his description, going "way out ahead of") his or her "body", leaving "it" to somehow sort itself out, decidedly odd, even allowing for the fact he no longer claims to teach the Technique. The implication that our mental state, consisting of what we are conscious of, is somehow more authentic than what "it" doesn't know the rest of the self is doing, seems unnecessarily divisive".

When I mentioned that example I was not putting forward a theory, I was describing what that person experienced and described to me. You are absolutely right in that it is a very 'divided' way of being--and most unconstructive, but that was where the person was at and it was an accurate description from him of what he was up to. His belief system was that he needed to do something to get up and his experience from going about it that way was that he ended way out ahead of himself. This is a similar sort of thing to what some people describe when they've been working for hours at a computer and then have very stiff and sore shoulders, but say that they "don't know what they were doing to make their shoulders sore because they were just so involved in the program". That is, they were existing (in their consciousness 'space') in the program in the computer, or to put it another way, they had narrowed to the computer and were only present there.

You wrote:

"Surely, it is not only in Alexandrian terms that the self includes everything? We are indivisible, mind permeating body. I don't think any useful distinction can be made between the aspect of use that is thought and the aspect that is muscular, since they are essentially one and the same."

You seem to be speaking theory here or at best an abstract generality. I was speaking of the actual person's actual experiences and thoughts and their description of where and what they were up to... And then correlating that with what was happening to them.

You wrote:

"As for whether or not what he is teaching is the Alexander Technique, I think Stacey Gehman put David's current position clearly. If David believes in the Primary Control as he describes it and is knowingly working towards stopping interference with that (and if, I might add, he believes this

leads to conscious - i.e., individual - control over the same process) then, yes, he is teaching the Technique, albeit in a radically different way. If, as I suspect, he has lost faith in the existence of a Primary Control, but prefers to work with the unspecified concept of allowing general use to improve through an indirect, hands-off approach, then I would say he is teaching something else."

If you mean by Primary Control, some relationship of the head/neck/back that we can change in some way to bring about better physical/mental/emotional functioning, then yes, I certainly no longer think that this is relevant--to either change or get involved with in any way.

What I do think is important to see what the person's belief systems are (their conceptual framework, their construct, whatever you want to call it), how this construct is reinforced by their experiences and how their actions based on this construct and experiences serve to further reinforce the beliefs. Once we can uncover this, it is relatively easy to show somehow how and where this construct simply does not match the facts of what happens right in front of them. When someone 'experienced' directly a 'violation' of his or her reality, change is inevitable. Before this they are trying to operate on the basis of the way they think/feel/believe things are. However, this is not the way the world actually is, so inevitably they are going to run into it and have problems. As they uncover these delusions and misconceptions and misappreciations and come to directly experience things more accurately--in other words, learn--their 'reality' changes and they are now living in a way more consonant with the world as it actually is--hence those problems are gone, never to come back.

You wrote:

"Incidentally, concerning the ironist, I am surprised David should tell Peter that his student "didn't know about the third degree of mobility in the shoulder joint before you told her". I would have thought she almost certainly did, in exactly the way I know about it, without having a clue what it means - unconsciously, from early learning experiences. Their only difference (David and Peter's) lies in how they might remind her (and me) of what had earlier in life been obvious."

You appear to be operating from the same premise here as many others--that of thinking that someone can 'know' something unconsciously. If they don't know it, that is, they cannot say it if you ask them, then who is this unconscious 'them' who 'knows' it? When you see it from the person's point of view (not the point of view of the teacher or some god-like overview or in hindsight) it is obvious that the person does not know about it--this is why it comes as a surprise to them and a 'new' bit of learning for them if some teacher tells them.

But I would never 'remind' someone about such a thing because I do not think it is at all important--it is merely the way their system is responding to what they are up to. I am not interested in changing their functioning that way. I'm interested in finding out what they were actually up to during the ironing when they noticed their perceived symptoms. As you can see from Peter's lesson, the ironist had no idea of the arm ranges--he had to 'remind' her.

If we were to open up the student's world rather than project the teacher's knowledge onto her, chances are that things would be much more like this: (this is pure

speculation, of course, but backed up by many similar teaching experiences), "I'm trying to get through it as fast as possible because I don't like ironing". Whereupon I would suggest that since she was rushing through it AND she had those symptoms, MAYBE they go together. To find out we could make an experiment to see what happens if she doesn't try to get through it as fast as possible, but rather let it take the time it takes and be there for each moment of it. What would likely happen then (again speculation based upon numerous experiences) is that she would report that she felt much better and rather enjoyed the ironing; perhaps also that she was much more 'here' and could see how she really was not at all present usually. In fact she might also realize that she was like this in so many other activities. Thus she would come to see that her not liking ironing was in large part a vicious circle of unpleasant feeling from rushing through it, which she was doing because she didn't like the unpleasant feelings she got from rushing through it. Maybe from this piece of work, but probably from exploring in addition some of the other places she rushes through, she would eventually learn that rushing is an unconstructive mode and is not the way we are built to operate. Furthermore she'd have the knowledge of the meaning of her system's feedback (tension/pain) to tell her when she started to rush again. She would not need to free her neck or release the tension, she simply needs to recognize that she was rushing and stop rushing. In other words she has a more reliable appreciation of her experiences...

You wrote:

"David suggests that what he is doing is too far removed from the current general consensus to be comfortably included within the mainstream. He doesn't say so but I can readily imagine a moderator from a traditional training course, where hands-on work predominates in relative silence - or even noisy abandon - but where without a chair or a couch nothing much would be expected to happen, having problems authenticating people from David's course. Besides, why should he or his students want to be so authenticated?"

Well, they certainly don't now. The latest 2 to become LearningMethods teachers had started training with me several years ago in my Alexander teacher training school but now are happy to call what they do LearningMethods. The other 5 teachers were all Alexander teachers before and are now gradually ceasing their Alexander practice and leaving that name behind. The newest ones coming in to train with me, of course, have no connection to the Alexander work.

You wrote:

"If David's approach works, if the Primary Control exists, it will be happening on that level anyway, in which case his insights should eventually be incorporated into the traditional Alexander means; if the Primary Control doesn't exist, but some other, inherent internal wisdom does, which his approach helps elicit, then "LearningMethods" will come into its own, while the Alexander Technique either fades away, bereft of its central thesis, or becomes the pre-eminent system for purely postural improvement it often looks like doing anyway. If David's approach doesn't work, or doesn't work sufficiently often or well, it will presumably die a natural enough death."

Nicely put. We'll see, I guess...

You wrote:

"My biggest problem with LearningMethods is David's rather too simplistic offering of "being present in the moment" as the universal panacea. Please, don't get me wrong. I happen to believe, and have believed for some time, that this is the universal panacea. The difficulty is putting it into practice."

I'm not saying that being present in the moment is the universal panacea at all. It is in fact quite easy to be present in the moment, but it is not a goal in itself. It is rather a means to learning. Only when we are present in the moment can we really see what happens and thereby expose our misconceptions and make the connections between our thoughts/actions and our emotions and reactions. That is to say, through being more in the moment we can learn how things really are. The more we learn this, the more we are operating in the world in consonance with it and the better everything is. This leads to being more present and therefore more learning and more accurate

You wrote:

"My knowledge of these things is shaky but I assume Buddhists and others (including, presumably, all mediators) have an interest in this."

Yes, it seems so. I have not studied Buddhism, but various people write me and say how similar some aspects are. Perhaps I could say that there seems to be a recognition of the same truths about being present and the unhappiness caused by our imagined ideals and desires. What seems to be a big difference is in the means used to discover more on the one hand and to come into a more aware state of being on the other...

You wrote:

"I do think, though, that it's probably a fallacy to imagine the 'present moment' is necessarily going to be tranquil."

Exactly. The present is simply whatever it is and is often full of all kinds of reactions and emotion from people. However, the more they can really be here, the more apparent it is to them where and what are their misconceptions and how their actions bind them into repeating and reinforcing their point of view. This knowledge is the liberation that blows their old belief systems out of the water leaving them with a more accurate appreciation of reality and all the attendant benefits (or rather it would be more accurate to say, without all the attendant problems of their old less accurate reality appreciation and operating).

You wrote:

"If David has some new insights into ways of being "present in the moment", particularly how to enter this state at will, and remain there for longer than it takes to reflect on it; and if he is willing to share those insights, I for one would be extremely grateful to him."

Lots, but this is where it is essential to be there in person... I'll look forward to that opportunity,

warmly,
David

Date: 14/11/98 06:30 PM

To: "David Gorman", [100653,2057]

From: Nicholas Brockbank,
dod@dodman.freeserve.co.uk
Subject: LearningMethods

Hello David,

Thanks for your response to what I wrote. I don't think our points of view are that far apart; it's more how we describe things. Certainly, I would agree I tend to theorise while you look at an issue from a more practical angle. Given that, I see no reason to argue, except possibly over whether we can or can't 'know' something unconsciously. Oh, and the relative ease of being in the present. Thrashing these questions out would be interesting, but they're a bit of a side issue.

What really interests me in what you're doing is how far it seems even from the 'purest' Alexander Technique. The more I consider it, the less I understand those people mailing into the debate who felt you were somehow repackaging and calling something else what they considered they were already teaching.

The use or non-use of the hands is a key issue; but if that was the only difference between what you do and what they do (and you used to do) it might only mean you had discovered a new method for achieving what Alexander originally did for himself in front of mirrors. That in itself would be formidable. Unfortunately (you might think, fortunately) that doesn't seem to be the case.

The crux of the matter is the thorny question of the Primary Control. (I only give it capital letters because Alexander did). I remember from your Alexander Review articles (particularly the last one, I think) you had ambivalent feelings about what this meant; but I don't believe there can be very much doubt that an Alexander teacher who doesn't subscribe to a belief in the 'directions', in the order in which they are traditionally given (whether preventative, as in inhibition, or otherwise), is not teaching the Technique so much as 'use'.

Teaching use is great. It's what I've always assumed Alexander teachers who don't go along with the Primary Control get satisfaction from doing; but what you're up to is even further away from this sort of teaching - light years, really - than the real Alexander Technique.

One of the contributors to the debate made a lot of the space Alexander devoted in his books to the nature of the thought processes ("conception") preceding an action.

However, although Alexander may have maintained that thought was primary, and only through changing it would general use change, he advocated such a precise form of 'preferred thought' along with such a specific idea of 'improved use', his approach really stands alone. Either it is followed to the letter or it isn't being followed at all.

What you appear to be doing is initially similar in that you encourage a student, at the moment of their habitual response to a stimulus, to recognise not only the nature of their thoughts but more importantly that by changing - or stopping - them, other, usually physical change occurs.

Obviously, from your viewpoint as an experienced (if no longer practising) Alexander teacher you would be able to recognise any similarities between the changes in use that may happen as a result of LearningMethods and those that result from the application of the Technique; but you have emphasised that you are not looking for anything particular but rely instead on people changing in ways that

are appropriate for them and that you can't possibly know in advance.

I assume therefore that you don't think the underlying wisdom that 'puts us right' is the same as Alexander's Primary Control. This is the major difference (besides hands on or off) between what you do and what Alexander teachers do. They (at least as I understand how most people teach the 'pure' Technique) are looking for specific physical changes in a specific order (neck free, etc.) brought about through a specific change in the student's thought process. Your approach is more open ended in that you appear to be accepting whatever physical change might come about through a student's self examination of, and self-experimentation with, their habitual patterns of thinking.

Last night, musing over the way you have explained what it is you are teaching, I had a sense of, not exactly *deja vu*, but...I don't know if you are familiar with Cognitive Therapy? I bought a book on it years ago by David Burns - I think I was training at the time - and was impressed by what I saw as similarities between his approach and what I was struggling to make sense of in my Alexander work.

His main - only, really - contention is that the way a person is feeling (emotionally) at any one moment is entirely dependant on the way they are thinking. He has a variety of examples of habitual ways in which we tend to think, almost all of which lead to our feeling bad. (His book is called "Feeling Good".) So long as a particular stream of thought (including variations on the same theme) continues, so the feelings persists. He emphasizes that the thoughts are not so much unconscious as simply failing to be recognised, similar in nature to our habitual surroundings: always present but barely noticed.

I had a personal example of this recently when my neighbour cut into our side of the hedge in a way I didn't like. I felt sick to the stomach out of all proportion to what had happened. My thoughts were actually very apparent, although I was unwilling to recognise them, centring as they did not on the hedge so much as my unwillingness to confront him on the issue.

So, the question I would like to ask you is, do you believe our emotional feelings are inextricably linked (and may even be physiologically identical) to our physical sense of ourselves and therefore our use? If so, assuming I had followed the procedures outlined in Burns' book for changing my thought processes to something more objectively appropriate, and had felt emotionally better as a result - I used to do this and it did work although it demanded constant vigilance - could I reasonably expect similar sorts of changes in use to those you are recognising in the people you work with to come about at the same time?

Admittedly, the nature of both our emotional feelings and our physical sense of ourselves will depend - they obviously already depend - so critically on the precise formation of our thoughts that the way in which we are encouraged to change them will have a huge bearing on results. Just as Alexander teachers specify an almost religious (sometimes even military) adherence to a specific form of thought, so David Burns tends to emphasise a sensible, realistic, objective outlook on life for turning the tables on what he sees as excessive 'negative' thinking.

I don't know in what directions if any you may or may not guide your students' thoughts, but I guess this - or any other LearningMethods teacher's influence - will be reflected in their use, if not their emotional state, too.

All the best,
Nicholas.

Date: 07/12/98 02:07 PM
To: Nicholas Brockbank, dod@dodman.freemove.co.uk
From: David Gorman, deegee@learningmethods.com
RE: LearningMethods

Hi Nicholas,

I was just looking down my 'queue' of e-mails to answer and saw (again) your last e-mail to me. I just wanted to say that I am still intending to reply to it, but I have been so busy recently... There is, however, a light at the end of the tunnel in the shape of 6 weeks break when I can get caught up. I re-read the e-mail and also want to let you know how much I enjoy your articulateness.

Please be patient and a response will soon be winging its way to you.

warmly,
David

Date: 10/12/98 06:30 PM
To: "David Gorman", [100653,2057]
From: Nicholas Brockbank,
dod@dodman.freemove.co.uk
Subject: LearningMethods

Hello David,

Thanks for the message. This is just to say I'm probably not going to bother mailing that original contribution I sent you to AlexTech - at least for the time being - since it would just vanish beneath the avalanche of carping about quackery, etc, that seems to be the current topic.

Actually, I noticed the last couple of days a relatively conciliatory tone appearing, possibly in response to a couple of plaintive requests from 'wounded' subscribers to turn it down. John Coffin even found time to say something vaguely positive about you!

Nicholas.

[Ed. note: Here is the relevant snippet from the posting from John Coffin (replying to Tom Vasiliades):

"Tom Vasiliades wrote:

"Yes, FM was able give a demonstration of the principles he had discovered. Does this mean we should not attempt to advance the work. Marjorie Barstow was much maligned in certain Alexander circles for teachings groups and/or not being 'true' to the Alexander work. What if David Gorman is on to something and advancing the Alexander work?"

What does this have to do with the matter at hand? I have said nothing about anything you may be proposing as 'advances' to the Technique, though I suspect I might. Barstow's group work inspired healthy doubt among those who were worried about the special problems such work could entail. On the

other hand, she forced 'normal' teachers to think about how and why they taught the way they did.

My take on Gorman's new work (at least as I have seen it described) was that he IS advancing the Technique, by reemphasizing aspects of the work that had been ignored or underused by the rest of us. I objected to his taking this new emphasis out of the 'Alexander' loop, although I am more sympathetic now.

Date: 10/12/98 02:07 PM
To: Nicholas Brockbank, dod@dodman.freemove.co.uk
From: David Gorman, deegee@learningmethods.com
RE: LearningMethods

Nicholas,

I understand your reluctance to post your contributions so long after the fact, especially in the current climate. I, myself, almost unsubscribed from the list in the last few days... but am hanging in for a while.

If you don't post your writings to Alextech they can't be added to the debate 'archive' which is on Direction Journal's web-site. However, I am still maintaining a copy on my web-site (I was the one who put together the directionjournal version). Would you be OK with me adding your contribution and my replies and your reply to my reply etc. up on this version? I would just add them onto the end of debate with a note that these were not posted to the list but send back and forth privately, but are reproduced here with permission. I think it would add a very articulate new dimension and summation of the debate... Let me know your feelings about this...

I just had Peter Ruhrberg come on my recent workshop in Freiburg. We had a good time exchanging ideas and he had some very positive things to say about the work. It makes such a difference of course to see the work in action and so far he's the only one from the debate who has actually come to see for himself. By the way, I will be in the UK soon for another workshop (late January in Edinburgh, early February in London). I'll send out an e-mail message with details soon... Perhaps we can meet up then?

warmly,
David

Date: 12/12/98 06:30 PM
To: "David Gorman", [100653,2057]
From: Nicholas Brockbank,
dod@dodman.freemove.co.uk
Subject: LearningMethods

Hello David,

Yes, for sure, tack what I've sent you so far onto the end of your copy of the debate. Please do send details of your upcoming February trip.

Nicholas.

Date: Thu, 14 Jun 2001 20:43:59 -0700
To: "David Gorman" deegee@learningmethods.com
From: Joseph Boland jeboland@yahoo.com

Subject: AT, etc.....

DAVID....

If the enclosed would be of use to you, please use it.

Be well,

JOE Mariposa, California / USA

FILE NOTES

Alexander started with a simple idea, to wit, the way we use ourselves has functional consequences and that misuse does not have to be a permanent condition. The procedure he developed, what we call the Alexander Technique, was his attempt to provide a practical procedure for restoring innate good use to the human organism.

Did Alexander see the "Technique" as a *fait accompli*, a finished product, or a final draft? I don't think so, but it has been the dominant tendency of successive generations of teachers, students, and disciples to treat it as such and to pass it along with all the inherent flaws intact and labeled DO NOT TAMPER.

What Gorman is doing is in my view a welcome public challenge to the "keepers" of the Alexander Technique to resume a line of inquiry and experimentation that Alexander started and took, not to a point of completion, but just as far as he could in the time he had. If that means substantive rethinking of the Technique, then so be it; our priority should be to help people improve the way they use themselves by the most effective means possible, not to perpetuate a static process in the name of dogmatic purity. Having said that I can't say I was impressed with or encouraged by the manner in which Gorman's views were received on the alextech forum.

In my view Gorman is on the right track in dismissing the traditional fixation on an anatomy-specific "Primary Control" and the attendant ritual involving "directions". This has always been the weak link in the Technique and I believe there is evidence suggesting that even Alexander was coming to recognize as much, but like a bad habit it has persisted.

The Technique acknowledges the unification of mind and body but then proceeds to assume that misuse is essentially "physical" and that one can effect primary change by "being more aware" of use and mentally "directing" the body to do something else.

The disconnect is that if misuse is present and mind and body are unified then it is reasonable to suspect that one does not know how "to be aware" or to "think" and that in fact this is not an insignificant part of the problem, maybe even the cause.

It has been my working premise for a number of years that if there is such a thing as a "primary control", it is the way we perceive and interpret (or don't) reality in the broadest sense of that word. This is not an original concept anymore than is "non-doing", both of which have been at the core of meditative practice for centuries and as a student of meditation I've found meditative practice and literature invaluable aids for developing a practical understanding of both concepts and, by extension, the Alexander Technique.

Misuse as defined in the Technique is a manifestation/symptom of perception and like Gorman I've

found that the restoration of innate use follows the restoration of innate perception. I would even go as far as to say that it is the suspension of habitual "intellectual" perception that produces the pleasant kinesthetic byproduct that we associate with an Alexander lesson, not a preoccupation with directions, directing, and anatomy.