ALEXANDER'S WAY

Frederick Matthias Alexander

In His Own Words and in the Words of Those Who Knew Him

BY ALEXANDER D. MURRAY

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NOVIS PUBLICATIONS

Thank you to Jean M.O. Fischer and Mouritz for granting permission to reprint the many quotes from F.M. Alexander's writings and others. It is my hope that *Alexander's Way* will inspire readers to explore Mouritz's catalogue and read the excerpted works in their fuller context. See page 183 for information on sources published by Mouritz.

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Originally published in 2011 as *F.M. Alexander: In His Own Words and in the Words of Those Who Knew Him*.

To my wife Joan
and her continuing search
for Alexander's Way

A way that can be walked
is not The Way
A name that can be named
is not The Name.

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

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Preface

The purpose of the original edition, *F.M. Alexander: In His Own Words and in the Words of Those Who Knew Him*, was to distill the process through which Alexander developed his technique. It is possible to retrace his steps, using his detailed instructions at various stages of his progress, in an attempt to "perform" the operations he describes. I have added "Alexander's Way" to the title of this new edition with a nod in the direction of Patrick Macdonald. One of the sayings Macdonald frequently quoted was from the philosopher Lao Tzu: "The Way that can be told is not the real Way, / The Name that can be spoken is not the real Name." At least we have Alexander's own written words as signposts on his journey. They are there to point the way for us, which we are free to find as best we can.

There are many people to thank. My explorations into Alexander's earliest writings were ably assisted by Jane Carr and Jeffrey Haas, who helped prepare Alexander's articles as booklets before they became available in *Articles and Lectures*. The existence of the 2010 edition of *F.M. Alexander: In His Own Words* was thanks to the patience and persistence of Philip Johnston. Katie Enders was instrumental in beginning the process towards this new edition.

A team of editors have worked with me to complete *Alexander's Way*. While the quoted content of the original edition remains much the same, Rose Bronec and Andrew McCann collaborated on making the form of Alexander's progress more easily discernible. I would like to especially acknowledge Andrew's ear for language and eye for organization and Rose's care and attention to detail. Thanks to her every quote in *Alexander's Way* is sourced and her bibliography is a true resource for readers who wish to further explore the history of our work. Evelyn Shapiro managed the project from beginning to end, and the clarity and beauty of the final book is a testament to her design expertise. We also benefited from the comments and close reading of Karen DeWig, Margie Marrs, and Malcolm Williamson. They are all friends and

teachers of the Alexander Technique and I am happy to express my gratitude to them for making this edition possible.

When Frank Pierce Jones sent John Dewey his paper about the Technique, "A New Field for Inquiry," in 1947, Dewey wrote back an enthusiastic letter of support in which he said, "Telling the story in terms of a personal developing experience was a happy choice and I think you have carried it out most effectively. As I think I have told you, I have always been baffled and held back by my sense of inability to convey the method to anyone who had not been through a person[al] experience of it. I think you have come as near to securing communication as is likely to occur."[1] Dewey's comment to Jones has encouraged me to conclude the present edition with a personal story, "Postlude: The Way of the Flute."

After some fifty years of reading and re-reading Alexander's writings, this book contains my personal understanding of his Way. When a phrase or sentence has struck me as especially significant, I have **emphasized it in bold**. The essence of Alexander's teaching is epitomized for me in his parable from Rudyard Kipling of the younger gods yearning for the secret to holy law.

> The younger gods cried out: "Oh where, most merciful one, shall we begin to look? All things are known to the gods. What more must we find out? Besides, being gods, who is there with power greater than ours to help us?" At this the Great Hall echoed with the laughter of the elder god. "The secret should not be hard to find," he answered. "I have hidden it within you. Look there!" And he roared with laughter at his own jest.[2]

I hope all young gods who read this book will take it to heart and find their own Way.

Urbana, Illinois
April, 2015

1. Author's collection, Dewey letter to Jones, New York, June 14, 1947. "A New Field for Inquiry" can be found in Frank Pierce Jones, *Collected Writings on the Alexander Technique*, ed. Theodore Dimon and Richard Brown (Cambridge, MA: Alexander Technique Archives, Inc., 1998), 19.

2. F. Matthias Alexander, "Preface to the New Edition," *Man's Supreme Inheritance: Conscious Guidance and Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* (London: Mouritz, 1996), xv. See the full parable at the end of Chapter VI in this book.

Introduction

> Anyone can do what I do, **if** they will do what I did.
> But none of you want the discipline.
>
> —F.M. Alexander[1]

The stimulus for this book—largely written in London in October 2010 and revised in 2014—was an advertisement from Amazon for the latest Alexander Technique "How To Do It" book. At least a dozen such titles are now in print. Do any of these present the technique that the authors have been trained to teach according to the four books by F.M. Alexander?[2]

Alexander has been quoted as saying, "It's all in the books." At the beginning of his career, Alexander wrote a number of booklets and articles, later publishing four books: *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (1910/1918), *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (1923), *The Use of the Self* (1932), and *The Universal Constant in Living* (1941). Searching Alexander's books, I realized *The Use of the Self* was a retrospective of nearly forty years. The process had started, it would seem, with overcoming his most basic bad habit—mouth breathing and gasping for breath—with nasal-breathing. Alexander's progress moved through various recommended breathing methods, including Behnke's diaphragmatic breathing method (described in an 1890 booklet still available in 1946), before arriving at his own "Full-Chest Breathing." A stay in New Zealand in 1895 and awareness of the "natural" breathing of the Maori people, led to "stopping what was wrong" and "letting the right thing do itself."

Alexander's "correct standing posture" of 1910 was a step in attaining a "position of mechanical advantage," or in Dr. Robert Scanes Spicer's terms, "normal orthograde posture." Alexander's chair and door exercises from 1910 were followed in 1911 with sitting, standing, and walking, in an *Addenda*

1. F. Matthias Alexander, *Aphorisms* (London: Mouritz, 2000), 76.
2. Teachers of the Alexander Technique, upon completion of a three-year training course, receive a certificate stating that they are qualified to teach the Technique as outlined in the books by F. Matthias Alexander.

to *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (reprinted in the 1918 edition as "Notes and Instances"). And around 1912, Alexander developed a "new use of his hands."

A most meticulous description of Alexander's method is in his second book, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, originally published in 1923. He begins by "sitting the pupil in the chair" according to the instructions in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, followed by a detailed "Illustration" of hands on the back of the chair. In this book he also recommends that an author (John Dewey) should break long periods of writing with respiratory exercises. Later, in 1936, Alexander made the same recommendation to those in sedentary occupations as a way to stay in shape.

It has taken me a long time to realize the importance of Alexander's earlier writings, in spite of his later endorsement of them in the prefaces to his books. He withdrew nothing, even though he was aware his instructions were often misunderstood. By example, in a conversation in 1946 he warned Walter Carrington against asking a pupil to relax the neck. To cut short a long story: It is ALL in the books.

This study has taken me more than fifty years. Take your time reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting—as Alexander often said. (As did my Scots English-teacher in Johannesburg in 1943.)

Urbana, Illinois
December, 2010

Chronology

Frederick Matthias Alexander · 1869–1955

Australia and New Zealand

1869	Born in Wynyard, Tasmania, on January 20.
1885	Works as clerk for the Mount Bischoff Tin Mining Company in Waratah, Tasmania.
1889	Moves to Melbourne. Clerical work, amateur recitals.
1892	Problems with voice. Begins experiments in use of self.
1894–1895	Tours Tasmania and New Zealand. Observes Maori people. Teaching, Auckland.
1895	Returns to Melbourne. Lillian Twycross, assistant. Teaches voice, Full-Chest Breathing.
1900	Moves to Sydney. Teaching, recitals. Booklet: *The Human Voice*.
1902	Meets W.J. Stewart McKay.
1903	"Prevention and Cure of Consumption" published at the recommendation of McKay. Produces, tours with *Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*.

London

1904	Leaves for London in April. First flat and teaching studio at Army and Navy Mansions, Victoria Street. Meets Robert H. Scanes Spicer who becomes his patron.
1906	"New Method of Respiratory and Vocal Re-education."
1907	F.M.'s brother A.R. (Albert Redden) joins him in London.
1908	"Re-education of Kinaesthetic Systems."

1910 *Man's Supreme Inheritance,* London; New York. Chair and Door exercises.

1911 *Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda*, London. Descriptions of sitting, standing, and walking. Begins teaching at 16 Ashley Place, London.

1912 *Conscious Control*, London. Ethel Webb takes lessons and becomes secretary and assistant.

1913 Irene Tasker has first lessons with F.M. Will become his assistant, 1917, New York City.

1914 Marries Edith Young (widow of Robert Young, Sydney colleague and friend) on August 10.

United States

1914 First travels to the United States. Teaches in New York and Boston for six months each year from 1914 to 1922.

1916 Meets John Dewey, who becomes a lifelong friend.

1918 *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, revised and enlarged edition, London, New York.

1920 F.M. and Edith adopt her niece Peggy.

London

1922 Returns to teaching in London full time.

1923 *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, New York; London, 1924.

1924 Buys country estate Penhill in Bexley, Kent.

Irene Tasker starts the little school for children, Ashley Place.

1926 Writing *The Use of the Self* begins in earnest. Primary Control. (Preliminary work on *The Use of Self* possible as early as 1920.)

1931 February begins first training course with six students.

1932 *The Use of the Self,* London; New York.

1934	Margaret Goldie takes over the little school, Penhill.
	A.R. moves to Boston.
1935	Irene Tasker moves to South Africa. Will visit London in 1938 and 1944 and return to England in 1949.
1938	Edith Alexander dies. Frank Pierce Jones takes first lessons with A.R.

United States

1940	Little school students evacuated to United States, escorted by F.M. and other teachers.
1941	Whitney Homestead, Massachusetts. First U.S. training course. Training will be completed by A.R.
	The Universal Constant in Living, New York; London, 1942.

London

1943	F.M. returns to London.
1947	A.R. Alexander dies. He had suffered a stroke in 1944.
	Evidence taken in the South African libel case. F.M. suffers stroke in December.
1948	Case tried in Johannesburg. Awarded damages for libel. F.M. begins teaching again in March.
1955	F.M. Alexander dies after a brief illness on October 10.

Never let yourself be goaded into taking seriously
problems about words and their meanings.
What must be taken seriously are questions of fact,
and assertions about facts: theories and hypotheses;
the problems they solve; and the problems they raise.

Karl Popper, *Unended Quest,* 1974

CHAPTER I

1894–1904

PRE-1900: DELSARTE'S INFLUENCE

The Alexander Technique is part of a long process, the most significant part of which was the fascinating development of its initiator. Frederick Matthias Alexander's earliest experience as a teacher was in his last two years at school, when he was a monitor, or teacher's aide, in the one-room schoolhouse in Wynyard, Tasmania. When he later wrote of the problems produced by antiquated educational methods, he was speaking from experience. In 1889, after three years working as a clerk for the Mount Bischoff Tin Mining Company, he moved to Melbourne, Australia, where he worked a variety of clerical jobs and first considered pursuing a career as an actor and reciter. Alexander's ambitions as an actor were hobbled by persistent problems with his voice and, in 1892, he began the observations and experiments which he would relate forty years later in the first chapter of *The Use of the Self*.

One of Alexander's earliest influences was the Delsarte system of dramatic expression and elocution. The Delsarte method was best known at the time through the publications of Genevieve Stebbins. Her book, *Delsarte System of Expression* (1885), was the most widespread account of Delsarte's work. The hours that Alexander reportedly spent daily, in front of the mirror, were recommended in her "Aesthetic Gymnastics" and the first of his public recitals in 1894 included "Parrhasius," a poem used in the Delsarte method. On the letterhead for Alexander's 1900 "Vocal and Dramatic Studio," he printed THE DELSARTE SYSTEM in a font larger than his own method of Full-Chest Breathing.[1]

1. F. Matthias Alexander, *Articles and Lectures: Articles, Published Letters and Lectures on the F.M. Alexander Technique*, ed. Jean M. O. Fischer (London: Mouritz, 1995), 13.

Alexander's technique also bears interesting similarities to Delsarte's method because both men attempted to solve similar problems in their own lives. In her introduction, Stebbins describes Delsarte and his method.

> "François Delsarte was born November 11, 1811, at Solesme, France. His father, a physician, died leaving his family poor. The young Delsarte was sent to Paris, in 1822, to study with a painter on china, but his tastes carried him into other channels. He became, in 1825, a pupil of the conservatory, a government institution for instruction in dramatic art, music, and the ballet. Here, for the want of proper guidance, **he lost his voice**.[2] Finding himself thus incapacitated for the stage, he resigned that career for that of a teacher of singing and the dramatic art. Realizing that he had been shipwrecked for want of a compass and pilot, he determined to save others from his fate by seeking and formulating the laws of an art hitherto left to the caprice of mediocrity, or the inspiration of genius. After years of unremitting labor and study—study which took him by turns to hospitals, morgues, asylums, prisons, art galleries, etc., patiently unearthing the methods of past genius—study which kept him by the hour watching the children at play in the great public gardens, weighing humanity everywhere and everyhow, he succeeded in discovering and formulating the laws of aesthetic science. Thanks to him, that science has now the same precision as that of mathematics. He died, without arranging his life-work for publication, July 20, 1871. Many are the names, famous in their different careers, that have owed much to his instruction—Rachel, Sontag, Pasca, Monsabre, etc."
>
> …[S]urely an art like acting should have some higher standard than the empirical caprices of its exponents. "Trusting to the inspiration of the moment, is like trusting to a shipwreck for your first lesson in swimming."[3]

In her *Delsarte System of Expression,* Stebbins offers "Decomposing Exercises":[4]

2. Emphasis added by the author appears in **bold** here and throughout the book. All other emphasis is original to the source.
3. Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1885), 74–75
4. The French term *décomposer* in music means subdividing a note into shorter values.

The first great step in the study of this art is the attainment of perfect flexibility. This is acquired by diligent practice of the decomposing exercises, as witness:

I withdraw my will-power from fingers, then hand. Touch it. Do not shudder. Do you feel as if a dead thing had struck your living palm? Now I will show you the same phenomenon with forearm, entire arm, waist, spine, hips, knees, ankles, toes, jaw, eyelids. Now I fall. Give me your hand and help me to rise. I did not mean to startle you so. I have not even bruised myself. I simply **withdrew my vital force** into the reservoir at the base of the brain.[5]

The first great thing to be acquired is flexibility of the joints. These exercises free the channels of expression, **and the current of nervous force** can rush through them as a stream of water rushes through a channel, unclogged by obstacles.…[6] We name these exercises *decomposing*. **I wish you to buy a mirror large enough to reflect your entire figure, and faithfully to practice many hours a day if you wish rapid results.**

Delsarte required of his pupils a great deal of hard work.…

The order of practice is as follows:

Aesthetic Gymnastics

1. Fingers.
2. Hand.
3. Forearm.
4. Entire arm.
5. Head.
6. Torso.
7. Foot.
8. Lower leg.
9. Entire leg.
10. Entire body.

5. *Élan vital* was coined by French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941). His famous "vital impulse" claims that there must be an original common impulse which explains the creation of all living species.

6. See Alexander's "Door Exercise" as described in Chapter III of this book, where he states, "All that is necessary is that the pupil shall, as it were, cut off the energy which causes the firm position at the hip joints and other parts."

11. Eyelids.
12. Lower jaw.[7]

Two decomposing exercises may explain Alexander's realization in "Evolution of a Technique," the first chapter of *The Use of the Self*, that he held too much tension as a result of being told to "take hold of the floor with the feet":[8]

> Decompose lower leg as forearm; agitate from knee.
>
> (a) Stand on footstool on one leg, then swing free leg by a motion of the entire body; free leg decomposed.
>
> (b) Lift leg from ground as a horse does in pawing, then drop it decomposed. You have discarded the footstool for the last exercise.[9]

During his first decade teaching in London, Alexander would offer descriptions of his practical work in his 1908 pamphlet "Supplement to Re-education of the Kinaesthetic Systems Concerned with the Development of Robust Well-Being" and in his 1911 *Addenda* to *Man's Supreme Inheritance,* many of which can be related to Delsarte exercises.[10] And, fifty years later, Delsarte's description of the "current of nervous force" would reappear in Goddard Binkley's diary (November 15, 1951) when Alexander models giving and withholding consent with movements of his fingers.

> For the sake of argument, say these two fingers represent the old habitual track. You receive a stimulus from within or without the self to do something, for example, sitting back in the chair. And you give consent to this idea—the message goes down this old track. But now, if you do not give consent to the stimulus to "sit back in the chair," the message stops here [pointing to his knuckles]. Then after withholding this consent, you prepare a new track [Alexander now extended his fourth and little fingers] which represents the new means whereby of allowing the neck to be free, the head to go forward and up, and the back to lengthen and widen [primary control]. This is the main idea,

7. Stebbins, 83–84.
8. F.M. Alexander, *The Use of the Self* (London: Orion Publishing, 2001), 33.
9. Stebbins, 86.
10. See Chapter III.

you see. You don't care a jot whether you sit back in the chair or not. That is not important.[11]

1894–1900: STEPS TO THE "FULL-CHEST BREATHING" METHOD

In 1894, at age twenty-five, Alexander returned to Tasmania where he gave a series of public recitals and taught "natural elocution." In a brief article, "Elocution as an Accomplishment," he describes his "system of voice culture," comprised both of voice building and voice production, "used together when training a weak voice, but with one of full power the voice production is all that is required."[12]

One year later, in 1895, Alexander toured New Zealand, teaching and giving recitals. An expanded version of the same article appeared in *The Auckland Star*, "Speech Culture and Natural Elocution." Here Alexander draws attention to the importance of the "art of breathing" mentioning the systems of Emil Behnke and Leo Kofler.[13] Emil Behnke (1836–1892) was the originator of the Behnke System of Voice Training. His daughter Kate Emil Behnke wrote several of her own books and pamphlets on voice and the problems surrounding vocal production. This excerpt from her book *Breathing for Health, Athletics, Sport* gives us an idea of what Alexander might have been teaching around 1895.[14]

Basic Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises should be commenced in recumbent position. The breath should be taken in through the nose, and expelled through the mouth.

Lie flat on the back, with a small cushion under the head. Place one hand over the base of the lungs and the other on the upper chest. In this position observe the movements of quiet respiration for a few

11. Goddard Binkley, *The Expanding Self: How the Alexander Technique Changed My Life* (London: STAT Books, 1993), 59–60.

12. Alexander, "Elocution as an Accomplishment," in *Articles and Lectures*, 3.

13. Leo Kofler (1837–1908), voice specialist, organist, and choirmaster; author of *The Art of Breathing as the Basis of Tone-Production* (1887).

14. Behnke's method was widely influential in Britain for many decades. Kate Emil Behnke's book, *Breathing for Health, Athletics, Sport,* was still in use in 1946 at the Royal College of Music.

minutes before commencing an exercise. Take care that this focusing of the attention does not cause any disturbance or alteration. If the breathing is correct the hand over the base of the lungs rises slowly and gently in inspiration and sinks equally slowly and gently in expiration. See that there is no movement of the upper part of the chest. It will be found that the movement in the centre (i.e. at the base of the lungs) and the sideways expansion take place simultaneously.

The error of upper chest breathing has been dealt with. That of mouth-breathing needs a word. If breath be taken through the mouth, the throat will soon become dry. Dust and germs will be carried into it, and into the lungs. Keep the mouth shut is a golden rule.

Breathing Gymnastics

(After mastering previous instructions.) Deep breathing will now be carried out in the erect position for the first time. For this to be done successfully the following points must be carefully observed:

1. The weight must be on the balls of the feet. The heels should be together, toes only slightly apart, not turned out.
2. Knees straight and firm.
3. Head erect, chin in, but not to the extent of tightening the throat. Position such as would permit of a book resting on the head.
4. Shoulders down and back.
5. Abdomen firm (not *"tight"*).

These constitute the **correct standing position** which is universally insisted on.[15]

Given the emphasis on restricting the movement of the upper chest, Behnke's breathing method could be considered abdominal or diaphragmatic. That Alexander's own breathing method was not yet fully developed is obvious from his comment on the breathing of new pupils: "They invariably indulge in clavicular breathing instead of the abdominal.…"[16]

During the four months he spent in Auckland (July through November 20, 1895), Alexander was also influenced by his encounters with New Zealand's

15. Kate Emil Behnke, *Breathing for Health, Athletics, Sport* (London: J. Curwen & Sons Ltd., 1938).

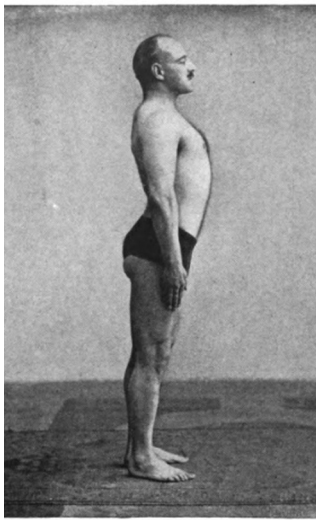
16. Alexander, "Speech Culture and Natural Elocution," in *Articles and Lectures,* 9.

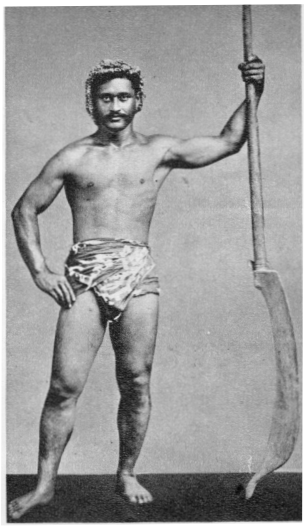
indigenous Polynesians, the Maoris, whose "natural" breathing struck him as especially admirable. Ten years later, he would note the positive influence of the Maoris on his teaching in his booklet, *A Respiratory Method*.

Between 1895 and 1900, Alexander built his teaching practice in Melbourne, taking on an assistant, Lillian Twycross, declaring her "the only certified teacher of my methods applied to the speaking and singing voice in Melbourne."[17] In 1900, he moved to Sydney and, by this time, he was teaching his own unique method, advertised as "Full-Chest Breathing." In that same year, Alexander published a booklet, *The Human Voice Cultivated and Developed for Speaking and Singing*, sold for six pence in Sydney, which describes his method of Full-Chest Breathing and emphasizes the importance of nasal respiration. The booklet refers to three types of breathing commonly taught at the time—clavicular, costal, and diaphragmatic—all of which Alexander's method rejects.

> Three classes of breathing gymnastics are imparted, viz.:
>
> (1) Those for the development and control of the muscles used in full *in*spiration.
> (2) Exercises which train the muscles used to control the slow relaxation of the lungs in *ex*piration.
> (3) Exercises which enable the student to take breath quickly through the nostrils.
>
> There is only one way to take a full breath, and that is to cause the whole of the breathing muscles to act together, which can only be accomplished by going through a proper course of breathing gymnastics suitable to each special case. Every person, before being trained, has his or her particular way of taking breath, and, consequently the breathing gymnastics which are of value to one person are useless to another. Proper manipulation of the singing voice is not possible with diaphragmatic breathing.
>
> Students who learn clavicular, costal, or diaphragmatic breathing, and find that breath-taking through the nostrils during vocalization is not practicable, at once conclude that nasal breathing is a failure in vocal work.

17. Rosslyn McLeod, *Up From Down Under: The Australian Origins of Frederick Matthias Alexander and The Alexander Technique* (Broadoak, Dorset: Creeds Ltd., 1995), 62.





Alexander toured New Zealand in 1895. A decade later he would reflect admiringly on the "natural breathing" of the Maori people in his pamphlet, "Mr. F. Matthias Alexander's New Method of Respiratory and Vocal Re-education." F.A. Hornibrook, a London-based physical therapist originally from New Zealand, similarly contrasts the easy stance of a man native to Fiji against the exaggerated military posture of the European. Hornibrook was a pupil and admirer of the famous bodybuilder Eugen Sandow, who traveled Australia and Asia, circa 1900. (*The Culture of the Abdomen*, by F.A. Hornibrook, 1924)

This is a mistaken idea, as they would rapidly discover if they understood the art of full-chest breathing. **Breath should always be taken through the nostrils, not only in singing and speaking, but at all times and under all circumstances.** Proper breathing is undoubtedly the very first study that should claim the attention of the would-be singer and speaker. When I mention *proper breathing*, I do not refer to inhalation only, but to the combined acts of inhalation and exhalation. From the voice-user's standpoint the one is useless without the other. After the lungs are filled, the air must be controlled, not allowed to rush away as soon as the mouth is opened to vocalize, as is the case with all singers who have studied the ordinary systems. It cannot be otherwise when the upper chest is *falling in* from the moment the mouth is opened to vocalise and the muscles intended by Nature to control and economise the air in vocalizing are prevented from doing duty by this imperfect mode of expiration.

CHEST-SINKING during the act of singing has another serious aspect. While vocalising chest tones the vibrations of the vocal ligaments cause the air-column in the windpipe to vibrate, which renders the tones fuller and richer. If the windpipe can rest against a *solid chest wall,* the tones will be rounder. If the chest is not kept firm, the windpipe loses its support, becomes unsteady, and the tone will sound uncertain and lacking in fullness.

Economy in exhalation is the great secret of gaining vocal perfection, and Nature has provided muscles to regulate control without in any way causing the least strain to the throat. In dealing with the matter of exhalation from this point I will call the act (when speaking or singing) manipulation. By manipulation I mean the throwing of the air back upon the vocal chords after the inhalation. Upon this throwing back of air upon the vocal chords the quality, power, etc., of the voice depends. There are two modes of correct manipulation, the one for speaking, the other for singing; and when they are applied an improvement in the voice is at once apparent to the most ordinary listener. After the manipulation has been perfected the student must turn his attention to the proper formation of the resonance cavities which convert the tone into the different vowel and other sounds necessary in vocalization. Helmholtz calls the mouth the resonance cavity for the formation of vowels. And with this foundation voice-cultivation can be attempted without fear of harming the human voice.

Singers and speakers who attempt to cultivate the voice without this foundation do all their vocalising and breathing with the muscles of the throat, and, consequently, at least seventy-five percent of vocal students suffer with throat troubles. Dr. Lennox Browne says: "Each day I live I am more convinced that the method of *in*spiration—but more particularly the *economy of expiration*—is of the first importance in the production of all vocal tone, and that faults in the method of breath-taking and breath-emissions are at the root of the throat diseases of singers and speakers which come under my notice."[18] *For the benefit of singers,* it may be mentioned that the

18. Lennox Browne (co-author with Emil Behnke on voice-related books), an ear, nose and throat specialist of the era who influenced the teaching of voice and singing.

> breathing gymnastics imparted at my studio include the exercises in full by which the celebrated singer Farinelli (pupil of Porpora and Bernacchi) gained that marvelous control over the breath for which he was noted.[19]

1902–1903: W.J. STEWART MCKAY AND "THE PREVENTION AND CURE OF CONSUMPTION"

In 1902, Dr. Stewart McKay (1866–1948), a leading Sydney surgeon, sought out Alexander for lessons, declaring, "If your teaching is sound, I'll make you; but if it's not, I'll break you."[20] He became a pupil and friend. In his "Autobiographical Sketch" of 1950, Alexander would write admiringly of McKay, on whose personal qualities (particularly his taste in dress and food) he probably modeled his London lifestyle.[21] Alexander acquired recommendations from McKay and other prestigious Australian medical professionals and also picked up gentrified behavior and speech habits that facilitated his social success. By discarding his Australian accent in favor of "natural elocution" (upper class English), Alexander would facilitate his acceptance into London high society, as many of his future supporters would be leading physicians, London- or Edinburgh-trained, who belonged to the upper echelon of English society.

McKay praised Alexander in a 1903 letter before Alexander departed Sydney:

> During the year that I studied with you and the years that you took many of my patients in hand, I learnt that the whole world wants to be taught to breathe, and I have no hesitation in saying that you have hit on methods that are admirably suited to improve one's breathing powers. ***You have the confidence of a large number of Medical men*** **and you have my full permission to say that I guarantee this fact.**[22]

19. F.M. Alexander, *The Human Voice Cultivated and Developed for Speaking and Singing* (Sydney: ca. 1900), 9–11. Booklet, copy from Jackie (Joan) Evans to Alexander D. Murray.

20. Alexander, "Autobiographical Sketch," in *Articles and Lectures*, 237.

21. Ibid, 243.

22. Alexander, "A Protest Against Certain Assumptions," in *Articles and Lectures*, 108.

On December 12, 1903, Alexander's article on "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption" was published in *The Daily Telegraph* at the recommendation of McKay. Alexander's article reveals the influence of the medical community on the development of his technique and his realization of its potential significance.

> The subject [consumption] has been discussed in the columns of the local press from time to time, from the point of view of the leading medical practitioners, and from the point of view of those concerned in the many known forms of treatment employed in combating this dreaded disease; but, so far, I am not aware that it has been considered from the breathing expert's point of view.[23]

In his biography of Alexander, Michael Bloch explains the relevance of Alexander's "Prevention and Cure of Consumption" article:

> [A]t that period, forty years before the introduction of antibiotics, the main treatment for tuberculosis was a regime of total rest combined with the deep breathing of fresh air to increase the oxygen intake; and F.M. argued that what was needed was not so much a visit to an expensive sanatorium, nor "deep-breathing exercises" of the sort then in vogue, but the shedding of a number of common "harmful habits" which had resulted in "the decay of the breathing power of mankind." He summarized these as follows:
>
> a. a strong and apparent contraction of the throat and neck muscles
> b. a very distinct depression of the larynx
> c. raising the shoulders, thus rendering correct respiration impossible
> d. a "sniffing" sound (in nasal breathing), or a "gasping sound" (in mouth breathing) accompanies each inspiration
> e. the contraction of the nasal passages
> f. a very poor thoracic mobility (vital capacity)
> g. a habit of mouth-breathing, with its attendant ills.[24]

23. Alexander, "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption," in *Articles and Lectures*, 19.

24. Michael Bloch, *The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander: Founder of the Alexander Technique* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 51–52.

These harmful habits were followed by this sound practical advice in Alexander's article:

> Such defects could not exist if the thoracic mechanism performed the functions ordained by Nature. **The motive power for the respiratory act belongs solely to the thorax; and the existence of this natural action ensures that the throat and neck muscles, the larynx and the shoulders remain passive; the breath will pass noiselessly into the lungs, while those passages will be dilated instead of being contracted.**
>
> The existence of this serious mischief, the contraction, instead of the dilation of the nasal passages in inspiration, is one of the many simple facts that may be cited in connection with the harmful and absurd mode of respiration that holds sway in our midst.
>
> Imagine the folly of narrowing an air tube when desiring to force a larger volume of air through it; and yet this is exactly what occurs in ordinary breath-taking. Of course common sense dictates that we should endeavor to increase the size of the air tube; and to make this possible Nature has so constructed the nasal organ that its tube-like passages are capable of being dilated to a considerable degree.
>
> In this connection I wish to point out that whenever the thoracic mechanism is in operation the nostrils will be dilated with each noiseless inspiration; but when the motive power is not in the thorax, diametrically the reverse will be the case. These defects will be hardly perceptible in ordinary tranquil breathing, but will be apparent in a more or less degree in conversation, during active exercise, or during the endeavor to take a full breath.[25]

Forty years later, during World War II, drug treatments for tuberculosis were still far from widespread. In his 2000 foreword to *An African Odyssey,* a memoir by Hugh Massey, Walter Carrington would describe the continued relevance of Alexander's work to severe respiratory illness.

> This is an amazing story told by an extraordinary man. For most of World War II Hugh Massey was living in one of the wildest parts of

25. Alexander, "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption," 20–21.

> Africa—the French Cameroon, amongst the pigmies and the chimpanzees. But, after his hazardous return to England, he developed severe pulmonary tuberculosis and began his long struggle against the disease. At that time no effective medical remedy had been discovered and the outcome was usually fatal. In his case, however, the story was very different.
>
> …When I first saw Hugh [in 1946], he was being carried on a stretcher into the house in Westminster where I worked. He had been diagnosed as suffering from advanced tuberculosis with severe cavitation of the lungs. He was far too weak to walk. He had come at the suggestion of his general practitioner for a consultation with Mr. F. Matthias Alexander, the originator of the Alexander Technique. It was a last despairing hope so far as he was concerned.
>
> Against all odds, he experienced a remission of his symptoms and, with Alexander's help, learnt to employ the technique. Indeed, he recovered from his sickness, the cavitation healed and he was able to return to his work as a mining engineer and resume a normal life.[26]

Continuing his biography of Alexander, Bloch offers further history of Alexander's views on prevention and cure in 1903:

> F.M. contended that "our mode of life is responsible for the decay in respiratory power" leading to "chest and lung weakness" which was "one of the greatest factors in the predisposition of people to pulmonary diseases." Doctors were not generally qualified to understand this, "for with rare exceptions they are cursed with the same…harmful habits." On the other hand, he congratulated a number of "liberal-minded, enthusiastic and practical truth-seekers of the medical profession" who had seen the light and sent him patients to rid them of such habits. F.M. concluded that prevention was better than cure, and that many of the ailments from which people suffered could be avoided if they learned to breathe properly, preferably from an early age. In this connection, he added that "the book I am publishing early next year will, I hope, give the necessary theoretical and practical assistance required by parents and teachers to enable them to carry out this great work." Within days of his article appearing, he had started

26. Hugh Massey, *An African Odyssey* (Bristol: Pomegranate Books, 2001), 9–11.

> advertising this book, which "embodied the details" of his "perfect breathing method," and to which the public were invited to subscribe for ten shillings and sixpence—though in fact no book of F.M.'s was to be published until 1910.[27]

In "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption" article, Alexander promotes himself as a breathing expert and then writes:

> Therefore I will endeavor to deal with this all-important subject from a purely breathing standpoint, in the fond hope that my very firm conviction, based upon practical experience may reveal:
>
> Footprints, that perhaps another,
> Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
> A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
> Seeing, shall take heart again."[28]

That Alexander quoted this poem only one year before he began his new career on a different continent may be significant. These lines by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow are the penultimate stanza from *A Psalm of Life* (1838). Alexander's selected quote and the full poem may reflect his overall outlook as a young man.

> **A Psalm of Life**
> *What the Heart of the Young Man*
> *Said to the Psalmist*
>
> Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
> Life is but an empty dream!—
> For the soul is dead that slumbers,
> And things are not what they seem.
>
> Life is real! Life is earnest!
> And the grave is not its goal;
> Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
> Was not spoken of the soul.

27. Bloch, 51–52. Ten shillings and sixpence (or a half-guinea) is about £56 in 2015, adjusted for inflation, or around $84 US.

28. Alexander, "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption," 19.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,—act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.[29]

29. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Yale Book of American Verse*, ed. Thomas R. Lounsbury (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912).

On April 19, 1904, Alexander sailed from Melbourne to London. He carried with him a letter of recommendation from Dr. Brady—McKay's ear, nose, and throat colleague—to Dr. Robert H. Scanes Spicer, Alexander's next great influence, advocate, and friend.

CHAPTER II

1904–1910

1904: LONDON

Robert H. Scanes Spicer's work and reputation were already known to Alexander. While still in Sydney, Alexander had referred to his future sponsor in his article "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption."

> Scanes Spicer MD, BSc, London, Surgeon, Throat Department, St. Mary's Hospital, London, in a recent lecture said: "As a matter of fact, the manner of breathing of every child, just as much as its food and clothing, housing and air, exercise, bathing, and education, **require(s) constant and unremitting attention from the moment of birth**."[1]

Spicer's words held personal meaning for Alexander, as reflected in Louise Morgan's *Inside Yourself: A New Way to Health Based on the Alexander Technique.*

> He was not a strong baby, and to the great distress of his mother he was unable to digest mother's milk. Naturally he failed to thrive. But so little was known about infant care in those days that the Wynyard doctor was helpless. One day Alexander's mother heard him say: "It's no good trying to rear that baby. Better let him go."
>
> The words struck her to the heart, but they also galvanized her into action. It seems she must have been a born experimenter, like the child whose life lay in her hands, for she at once began "trying things" to save her baby. Nobody recorded the types of feeding she tried hour after hour, but in the end she found that goat's milk, if given drop by

1. Alexander, "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption," in *Articles and Lectures: Articles, Published Letters and Lectures on the F.M. Alexander Technique*, ed. Jean M. O. Fischer (London: Mouritz, 1995), 22.

> drop, stayed down. So she bought a goat and fed the baby around the clock, and the baby lived.[2]

Because nasal breathing and breastfeeding are synchronous (both are brainstem activated in the newborn), this would account for Alexander's "gasping for breath" from birth. With mouth breathing—the habit that Alexander brought to the stage as a young actor—taking a big breath to project his voice would result in pulling back the head, as the jaw is already open. It was not primarily the pulling back of the head—which he hardly noticed speaking normally—but the extra demand for breath on stage which led to audible gasping, noticed by his brother (in Alexander's case) and in other performers (singers and actors) in Alexander's observation. Alexander had to learn to breathe through the nostrils, and nasal breathing became of prime importance in his teaching. According to his brother, Albert Redden (A.R.), Alexander's audible gasping for breath did not cease until he had been working on himself for ten years.

Michael Bloch's biography describes Alexander's first meeting with Spicer in June of 1904 as an instant success that led to a friendly and fruitful early relationship.

> Not only did Spicer show an instant appreciation of F.M.'s ideas, but F.M. with equal quickness noticed faults in Spicer's "use." Their first meeting soon turned into a "lesson" which brought Spicer, who suffered from poor health, considerable relief. Having called during the early afternoon at his house in Eaton Square, F.M. was prevailed upon to stay on for tea and supper by the surgeon, who was clearly fascinated by his work.[3]
>
> …Indeed, not only did Spicer almost immediately start sending F.M. patients to see what he could do with them, but he enrolled himself, his wife, and his children for further lessons; and in a speech he gave at a meeting of the BMA [British Medical Association] at Oxford in July 1904, he made observations on the mechanics of nasal breathing which appear to some extent to have been inspired by his recent meeting with F.M.[4]

2. Louise Morgan, *Inside Yourself: A New Way to Health Based on the Alexander Technique* (London: Mouritz, 2010), 29.
3. Michael Bloch, *The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander: Founder of the Alexander Technique* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 62.
4. Ibid., 63.

In *A Time to Remember,* Walter Carrington adds more details of Alexander's friendship with not only Spicer but Spicer's family as well.

> F.M. then went on to tell how Spicer had called him up after reading the first reports of Pavlov's work and said: "Here is a man who has done something years ahead of your work. I must see you at once to give you all the particulars about it." F.M. said: "If that is so I must hear about it at once so that I can go to him and work with him." After dinner Spicer started to read out and explain the report on Pavlov and F.M. began to laugh, saying: "Why that is what we have been doing with circus animals for years." Spicer looked very serious and then he began to laugh too. At that moment his wife came in and so they explained the matter to her and she said: "How like you, Scanes, to allow yourself to be taken in by a Russian of all people."[5]

In his 1906 pamphlet, "Details of Some Cases Sent by Doctors," Alexander describes the result when Spicer undertook a series of lessons.

> In August 1904, I imparted the method to a well known medical man, who had thoracic rigidity; was subject to colds and laryngeal attacks; inclined to corpulence; breathing—inspiratory and expiratory—was of a panting nature, and he could not hold breath for any reasonable time; yearly visit to Carlsbad necessary.[6]
>
> In 1905 he was in possession of a mobile thorax; expiration and inspiration normal; weight reduced by thirteen pounds; had complete freedom from cold and laryngeal attacks; general health greatly improved and the visit to Carlsbad deemed unnecessary.[7]

Spicer was the key to Alexander's early success in London and should be given credit for a positive influence on his development. Spicer would have been putting his own reputation on the line by promoting an "unqualified" colleague. His willingness to support Alexander also bears witness to the skill which Alexander had already developed when he arrived in London in 1904.

5. Walter H. M. Carrington, *A Time To Remember: A Personal Diary of Teaching the F.M. Alexander Technique in 1946* (London: Sheildrake Press, 1996), 58. Walter kept this diary on his return from service in the Royal Air Force.
6. A fashionable nineteenth-century spa in the Czech Republic.
7. Alexander, "Mr. F. Matthias Alexander's New Method of Respiratory and Vocal Re-Education," in *Articles and Lectures*, 34.

And just as McKay in Sydney influenced Alexander's sense of taste, Spicer broadened his intellectual horizons.

Alexander's familiarity with the writings of William James (1842–1910), the American philosopher and psychologist, may have been due to the influence of Spicer, who was well read in many different fields with a wide educational background from England, Europe and America. Philosopher Horace Kallen would later describe conversations with Alexander in 1918 as mentioning both William James and Delsarte as sources of his technique.[8] There are indications in Alexander's pamphlets of 1906 and 1908 that Alexander had been reading James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890). James's chapter on "Will" includes the seminal ideas of ideo-motor action (action without forethought) and reasoned, deliberate (or conscious) action—in which action is inhibited so that deliberation is possible. James's use of "inhibition" is similar to Alexander's use of the term. This chapter is well worth study in its original form and also in James's *Shorter Psychology*, written in 1892. An even briefer, but still insightful, form is in James's *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* with which Irene Tasker was familiar before meeting Alexander. In 1967 she would recall James's most basic advice: "Never discourage; discouragement is of the devil."

Spicer also probably introduced Alexander to new terminology: antagonistic action, kinaesthesia, and mechanical advantage. When compared with his earlier writings, Alexander's change in prose style and vocabulary becomes apparent from 1906 onwards. Spicer was a wealthy, well-educated doctor with a mechanical bent, as revealed by the model of the head, neck, and larynx he demonstrated at his 1909 talk and his use of photography to illustrate "back breathing." Alexander, by contrast, eschewed the camera and in his four books included only one photo of himself, which first appeared in a review of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* in 1910, and showed only a man's body without an identifying head.[9]

What Alexander was teaching, and some clues as to how he was teaching—between his arrival in London in 1904 and his publication of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* in 1910—may be found in his early pamphlets and in Spicer's adoption of Alexander's ideas in his medical writings of the time.

8. Horace Kallen (1882–1974), German-born American philosopher. See page 44.

9. See photo of F.M. on page 60. Robert H. Scanes Spicer, "Some Points in the Mechanics of Respiration," *The British Medical Journal* (September 11, 1909): 673–677. Wilfred Barlow also used photography in "Some Varieties of Misuse" in *More Talk of Alexander: Aspects of the Alexander Principle*, ed. Wilfred Barlow (London: Mouritz, 2005).

1906: *INTRODUCTION TO A NEW METHOD OF RESPIRATORY VOCAL RE-EDUCATION*

In his dissertation "Frederick Matthias Alexander 1869–1955: The Origins and History of the Alexander Technique," Jeroen Staring asserts "diaphragmatic breathing" was Alexander's method.[10] Alexander's 1906 booklet, *Introduction to a New Method of Respiratory Vocal Re-Education,* does reveal some similarities to Emil Behnke's diaphragmatic breathing method:

> For instance it is quite useless to ask anyone to raise or depress the diaphragm, but if he is asked to push out or draw in the pit of the stomach, first placing his hand on the part of the abdominal wall named, the mind has something to work upon; and **this applies still more to other parts of the muscular system of the inspiratory mechanism**.[11]

Yet Alexander had already voiced criticism of diaphragmatic breathing in his early 1900 booklet *The Human Voice*:

> Diaphragmatic Breathing…[is] a faulty method, because it fails to wholly fill the lungs, acting chiefly upon the lower and part of the central lungs, and any method that fails to fill every part of the organ must be discarded when there is one by which the chest can be thoroughly filled in a quarter the time required by any other system.[12]

Spicer's 1909 characterization of the new breathing method was "back-breathing." If this were what Alexander taught him in 1904, it is far removed from "diaphragmatic breathing."[13]

By 1906, Alexander describes his method as "Nature's," utilizing "antagonistic action" and allowing for a "perfect 'Ah' ":

10. Jeroen Staring, Dutch sociologist. Without Staring's research, his tenaciously critical view of Alexander, and support of Spicer, *Articles and Lectures* would not have appeared with the present content.

11. Alexander, *Introduction to a New Method of Respiratory Vocal Re-Education*, booklet in *Articles and Lectures*, 46.

12. F.M. Alexander, *The Human Voice Cultivated and Developed for Speaking and Singing* (Sydney: ca. 1900), 8. Booklet, copy from Joan (Mechin) Evans, from the estate of Amy (Alexander) Mechin, to Alexander D. Murray. Amy Alexander was F.M. Alexander's sister and the mother of Joan Evans and Marjory (Mechin) Barlow.

13. Spicer, 676.

> I do not claim to have discovered any new method of breathing, but to understand the only true one—Nature's.[14]
>
> Natural conditions in the human being cannot be present unless the different mechanisms of the body are working in unison with adequate activity.[15]
>
> Many people can acquire fair chest poise at the end of inspiration, but, with most singers, at **the end of the vocal expiration** the mechanism is absolutely disorganized.[16]
>
> What is requisite is a mode of respiratory re-education, having as its aim the restoration of a condition which was present at birth in every normal being.…At present I simply state the great principle to be **antagonistic action**, perfect employment of which is the forerunner of that control which ensures the correct use of the thorax in its fullest sense as the primary motive power in the respiratory act, also adequate muscular development, non-interference with the larynx and nasal dilatation.[17]
>
> Not one singer or speaker in a hundred can produce a sustained perfect "Ah" in either a whispered or a vocal tone.[18]

1906: "Mr. F. Matthias Alexander's New Method of Respiratory and Vocal Re-Education"

Alexander's pamphlet of 1906 emphasizes the importance of nasal-breathing, beginning with two quotes from Shakespeare:

> **Now set the teeth and stretch the nostrils wide.**
> —*Henry V,* Act 3, Scene 1
>
> **His nostrils drink the air…**
> —*Venus and Adonis*[19]

14. Alexander, "Introduction to a New Method of Respiratory Vocal Re-Education," in *Articles and Lectures,* 39.
15. Ibid., 40.
16. Ibid., 42.
17. Ibid., 43.
18. Ibid., 44.
19. Alexander, "Mr. F. Matthias Alexander's New Method of Respiratory and Vocal Re-Education," in *Articles and Lectures,* 33.

Alexander burnishes his credentials in teaching "natural breathing" by referencing his experience with the Maori people ten years earlier.

> That wonderful race, the Maoris, offered a splendid example of natural endowment from a breathing point of view, so Mr. Alexander lingered in New Zealand for a year acquiring knowledge from which his pupils now daily profit.[20]

That Alexander would mention the Maori people in 1906 is not a coincidence. The previous year, Maori players had toured the British Empire as part of the New Zealand national rugby team, winning all their matches except for one against Wales. Because of prejudice against the Maori players, they were banned from playing the Springboks in South Africa. Niall Ferguson explains the significance of rugby and the New Zealand team in *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order.*

> It was team games, however, that did most to make a reality of the ideal of Greater Britain [the British Empire of the 1890s]. Soccer, the gentleman's game played by hooligans, was of course the country's most successful recreational export. But "football" was always a promiscuous sport, appealing to everyone from the politically suspect working class to the even more suspect Germans; to everyone, in fact, except the Americans. If any sport truly summed up the new spirit of "Greater Britain" it was rugby, the hooligan's game played by gentlemen. An intensely physical team game, rugby was swiftly adopted right across the white Empire, from Cape Town to Canberra. As early as 1905 the New Zealand All Blacks toured the Empire for the first time, beating all the home sides except Wales (who vanquished them by a single try). They would probably have gone on to beat all the other white colonies but for the ban imposed by South Africa on the fielding of Maori players.[21]

1907: "THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF A NEW METHOD OF RESPIRATORY RE-EDUCATION"

As he did in "The Prevention and Cure of Consumption" (1903), Alexander includes Spicer's quote (*British Medical Journal,* 1902) in his 1907 pamphlet "The Theory and Practice of a New Method of Respiratory Re-Education":

20. Ibid., 34.

21. Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), Kindle edition.

> the manner of breathing of every child…require(s) constant and unremitting attention from the moment of birth.[22]

Alexander reminds us that the mechanical advantage evident on the inhale is as "essential" on the exhale. If you can go up to breathe in, then stay up on the exhale.

> It is not a matter for surprise, for, if a mechanical advantage is essential to a proper expansion of the thorax for the intake of air, it is equally essential to the controlling power during the expiration.[23]
>
> The **mechanical advantage** referred to is of particular value, for it means prevention of undue and harmful falling of the upper chest at the end of the expiration, which is always present in those who practise the customary breathing exercises, the pupil being then deprived of the **mechanical advantage** so essential to the proper performance of the next inspiratory act.[24]

1908, JULY: "WHY 'DEEP BREATHING' AND PHYSICAL CULTURE EXERCISES DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD"

In his flier "Why 'Deep Breathing' and Physical Culture Exercises Do More Harm than Good," Alexander describes the mechanical advantage in maintaining the poise of inflation while exhaling. In detail, he examines the problems with these typical breathing instructions:

> (a) to assume a proper standing position…
> (b) to draw in a "deep breath"
> (c) to hold the breath for a certain time…
> (d) to expel the air retained by forcing in some part of the chest or abdominal wall.[25]

22. Alexander, "The Theory and Practice of a New Method of Respiratory Re-Education," in *Articles and Lectures*, 54.
23. Ibid., 61.
24. Ibid., 64.
25. Alexander, "Why 'Deep Breathing' and Physical Culture Exercises Do More Harm than Good," in *Articles and Lectures*, 74–76.

1908, DECEMBER: *RE-EDUCATION OF THE KINAESTHETIC SYSTEMS CONCERNED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROBUST WELL-BEING*

Alexander's earliest versions of this booklet contain his "Doctrines of Antagonistic Action and Mechanical Advantage." These doctrines and the later version of *Re-Education of the Kinaesthetic Systems*, include one of the few places he uses the term "rigidity":

> In the process of *creating* a co-ordination one psycho-physical factor provides **a position of rigidity** by means of which the moving parts are held to the mode in which their function is carried on.
>
> This psycho-physical factor also constitutes a steady and firm condition which enable(s) the Directive Agent of the sphere of consciousness to discriminate the action of the kinaesthetic and motion agents which it must maintain without any interference or discontinuity.
>
> The whole condition which thus obtains is herein termed "antagonistic action," and **the attitude of rigidity** essential as a factor in the process is called the position of "mechanical advantage."[26]

In this booklet, you can see the influence of William James in Alexander's use of "ideo-motor attitude," and "with-holding" and "giving consent."

> The orders to be dictated by the teacher and mentally rehearsed by the pupil are of two kinds: (a) concerning definite inhibition and (b) concerning definite performance.…
>
> *…the order or orders concerning what is not to be done are to be considered as primary, and those concerning what is to be done as secondary.*
>
> That in order to secure the results desired, it is essential to teach the pupil to rehearse the dictated orders, not to do exercises, i.e. to devote his attention to *apprehending the instructions of his teacher*—those *means whereby* he is to gain what he requires, and not, as he will be apt to do, to concentrate his thoughts upon the end sought. The orders are necessarily prior to their execution, and if those dictated by the teacher are correct for the particular case in hand, the mental realization by the pupil will be automatically followed by their

26. Alexander, "Notes, Number 92," in *Articles and Lectures,* 289.

correct performance—a coordinate association with the **ideo-motor** impulses.[27]

In *Re-education of the Kinaesthetic Systems,* Alexander identifies length in the spine as "requisite natural laxness" and offers a description of what later was referred to as the "book exercise."

> Now the narrowing and arching of the back already referred to [example of boy] is exactly the opposite to what is required by Nature, and to that which is obtained in re-education, viz., *widening of the back and a more normal and extended position of the spine.* Moreover, if these conditions of the back be first secured, the neck and arms will no longer be stiffened, and the other faults will be eradicated.
>
> …The teacher must himself place the pupils in a position of mechanical advantage, from which the pupil by the mere mental rehearsal of orders which the teacher will dictate, can *ensure the posture specifically correct for himself,* although he is not, as yet, conscious of what that posture is.
>
> I append a simple example of what is meant by mechanical advantage. Let the pupil sit as far back in a chair as possible. The teacher having decided upon the orders necessary for securing the elongation of the spine (i.e. **requisite natural laxness**) and other conditions desirable to the particular case in hand, will then ask the pupil to rehearse them mentally, at the same time that he himself renders assistance by the skillful use of his hands. Then, holding with one hand one or two books as the case may be, against the inner back of the chair, he will rely upon the pupil inwardly rehearsing the orders necessary to maintain and improve the conditions present, while he, with the other hand placed upon the pupil's shoulder causes the body gradually to incline backwards until its weight is taken by the back of the chair. The shoulder blades will of course, be resting against the books.[28]

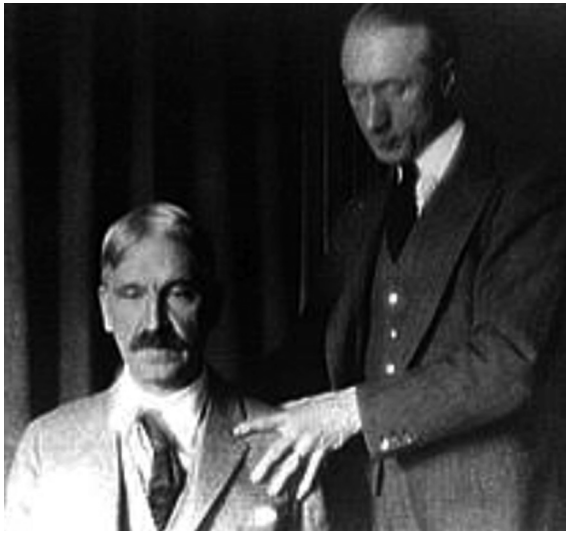
Horace Kallen took lessons with Alexander during World War I and would report that he used a carpet-covered "brick" between the shoulders rather than books as Alexander described in 1909.

27. Alexander, *Re-Education of the Kinaesthetic Systems Concerned with the Development of Robust Well-Being,* booklet in *Articles and Lectures*, 83.

28. Ibid., 82.

They took me down to Alexander, who was living at the Hotel Leonori with his brother; and Alexander asked me to dinner. We had dinner in his workshop with his brother, and he served champagne—which was an extraordinary and interesting episode. And then he told me that he'd been preparing a new book and wanted to know if I would review it. Well, I couldn't be committed unless somebody would ask me to; and Dewey saw to it that I was asked.

Dewey told me that at one time he suffered from a very stiff neck, and that he had had difficulty with his eyes. I think it was through Robinson (James Harvey) that he came to Alexander; and he said that Alexander had completely cured him, that he was able to read and to see and move his neck freely. Now Alexander's technique was a rather dubious one; it had been developed and elaborated in a variety of ways. Alexander told me that he had gotten his idea by reading James. And then he seemed to have forgotten about James and used the formula "ideomotor attitude"—no, not attitude but some other term that went with ideomotor which he had gotten from James Psychology. And in his own formulation what he called "the position of mechanical advantage" was a central idea. He said that every body was askew, every body had developed bad postural habits, that posture irradiated



Alexander often used a book—eventually a velvet-covered cigar box—between the student's back and the back of the chair. Alexander may be placing the "book" behind Dewey's back in this photograph of a lesson in New York City in 1916 or 1917 taken by Irene Tasker. Tasker was a student in one of Dewey's classes at Columbia University and would become one of Alexander's assistants in 1917. Note Dewey's eyes: is he trying to "feel" what is happening?
(John Dewey Papers, Morris Library, University of Illinois, Carbondale)

> a body's feelings and thinking, that therefore, if you could establish correct posture, you could correct everything posture involves. It was not only a universal constant, but a scheme of universal salvation.
>
> Dewey didn't take to the salvation, but he did get something out of the physiology, as applied later, say, in Mabel Todd's *The Thinking Body*, and implied in Walter Cannon's *The Wisdom of the Body*. Alexander held there's a natural way of sitting, standing, running, walking and so on—a correct unlearned condition of the muscles. But the ways of the society we grow up in make us crooked and sick. To be straightened out, we must take thought and learn how to recover the naturally right posture. To show me, Alexander put me in a chair, placed a carpet covered brick at my back, and altered my posture with his hands. Then he had me stand up and walk, and sit, walk, sit, move around again and again. I took Judge Julian Mack down to him once, and Julian couldn't see the good of it at all. He went once but never again.[29]

Kallen seems to have taken his chair work with Alexander to heart, as Goddard Binkley notes in his July 17, 1954, diary entry while on the training course:

> I was reading the big scrapbook at Ashley Place and was surprised by the number of very well-known persons who have "endorsed" Alexander's work and which yet remains relatively unknown to the world, excepting perhaps in certain circles in London, New York, Boston, and Johannesburg. I was even more surprised to discover the name of one of my old professors at the New School for Social Research in New York City, Horace M. Kallen. I took several courses in philosophy with him and read his two-volume work *Art and Freedom*. When I read his name in the scrapbook, I at once remembered how impressed I had been by his physical uprightness, his poise and bearing. He used to sit at his desk with his back well back against the back of his chair, the chair itself tilted backwards on its two back legs, his head seeming to spring up and turn so easily from side to side as he surveyed the class.[30]

29. Corliss Lamont, ed., *Dialogue on John Dewey* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), 26–28.

30. Goddard Binkley, *The Expanding Self: How the Alexander Technique Changed My Life* (London: STAT Books, 1993), 118.

Alexander's "book exercise" in chair work is discussed by a number of others. Walter Carrington notes the following in his personal diary on March 22, 1946:

> In class this morning, I asked F.M. about the evolution of the "book." He replied as follows. He wanted something to place behind his back in the chair in order to feel that part of his back. At first he tried an ordinary book. That was too heavy and tended to fall out of place. Then he tried tying it to the back of the chair with tape. That was not satisfactory because it was inclined to stimulate him to pull down and shorten his back. Next he tried an empty cigar box, but that slipped too easily. Finally he hit on the idea of a velvet-covered cigar box. This would stay in position by tending to cling to his clothes, but at the same time it would slide easily on the polished back of the chair and so enable him to lengthen up from it without difficulty.
>
> The purpose of the cigar box was (a) to stimulate the somewhat insensitive region of the anti-gravity muscles and (b) to stimulate the shoulder-blades to slip into place. He said that he does not often use the "book" himself now, because he can get what he wants with other means by his hands, but he advises us to do so in working with pupils and on ourselves. In the latter case, however, he remarked that there is some danger of losing our length in putting the "book" in place.[31]

Dr. Andrew Rugg-Gunn also mentions the book exercise.[32] Rugg-Gunn was a respected eye specialist who became interested in Alexander's work in 1913. He became a consistent pupil, friend, and perceptive observer, dining weekly with Alexander until a week before Alexander's death. In 1958,

31. Walter H. M. Carrington, *A Time To Remember: A Personal Diary of Teaching the F.M. Alexander Technique in 1946* (London: Sheildrake Press, 1996), 11–12.

32. Andrew Rugg-Gunn (1884–1972), a consultant ophthalmologist. He graduated from Edinburgh University in 1907 and served as a captain in the Royal Army Medical Corp during the First World War. For many years, he was senior surgeon at Western Ophthalmic Hospital, Central Middlesex County Hospital and Metropolitan ENT Hospital. A fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, he had his own medical practice on Harley Street. He was a pioneer prescriber of contact lenses, contributed to the design of ophthalmic instruments, and wrote *Diseases of the Eye* (1933). He referred to Alexander's ideas in many articles and academic papers including an article in *Women's Employment* introducing and recommending Alexander's Training Course and an article in *The Medical Press and Circular*, April 1940, "F. Matthias Alexander and the Problem of Animal Behaviour."

he wrote a book on Alexander which was never published.[33] He discusses the book exercise in his chapter "The Integrated Organism." He explains:

> The process termed by Alexander "widening the back" is an integral and important part of the primary control and not a separate movement. Nearly every pupil in the early stages of his training crouches when first asked to widen the back. Alexander emphasized this point in his lessons by placing a book between the back of a sitting pupil, and the back of the chair, demonstrating that the book is lightly held, not by pushing the body against it, but by the backward set and readjustment of the spine when the latter, as part of the whole self, is properly integrated.[34]

And early teacher Lulie Westfeldt (1895–1965) describes Alexander's teaching room:

> Hanging in the double window directly in front of his teaching chair was a very pleasing piece of stained glass. He often advised pupils to look at something pleasing like this while they were working. This bit of stained glass and a cigar box covered in velvet were the only "professional equipment" Alexander used. The box was helpful in getting a pupil's back in a more vertical position if he was sitting in a chair that had a backward slant.[35]

1909–1910: "A NEW CARDINAL PRINCIPLE IN THE TREATMENT OF DISEASE, AND ITS APPLICATION IN DISORDERS OF THE NOSE, THROAT, VOICE AND SPEECH" BY ROBERT H. SCANES SPICER

Spicer's positive enthusiasm for Alexander's skill was the result of lessons given to his whole family on arrival in London. Five years into their collaboration, however, and after failing to persuade his colleagues to learn from Alexander, Spicer attempted to describe the achievement of respiratory

33. Eric McCormack, *Eric McCormack to Frank Pierce Jones, 1958*, letter, copy from Helen Jones to Alexander D. Murray. Eric McCormack mentions his correspondence with Rugg-Gunn, who had been willing to send McCormack a copy of his manuscript.

34. Andrew Rugg-Gunn, "The Integrated Organism," in *Mature Consideration of the Work of F.M. Alexander,* ed. Alexander Murray, booklet (Alexander Technique Center Urbana: 2002), 19.

35. Lulie Westfeldt, *F. Matthias Alexander the Man and his Work* (London: Mouritz, 1998), 24.

re-education in his own terms, causing the end of their friendship and stimulating Alexander to write his first book, *Man's Supreme Inheritance*.

In February 1910, *The Medical Press and Circular* published a Clinical Lecture by Spicer who wrote—without acknowledgment—a detailed account of Alexander's work as viewed from the medical standpoint. Despite the plagiarism, the result, "A New Cardinal Principle in the Treatment of Disease, and its Application in Disorders of the Nose, Throat, Voice and Speech," is a valuable early account from a doctor who had lessons from Alexander and was convinced of the importance of his work. The change in Alexander's work, from this early account by Spicer to his own later descriptions of his unique skill, gives us an understanding of Alexander's ongoing process.

Here are some excerpts from Spicer's January 12, 1910 lecture:

> Maximum or high efficiency was only procured through the incessant integrating action of the nervous system, which automatically regulated the efficiency of the living engine to a large extent, provided the neuron-systems, and especially the exalted hierarchies thereof, were in a perfect state of nutrition and tone, and had been thoroughly trained, either unconsciously, through imitation of good models, or consciously, by systematic instruction from teachers who really understood what they were about. To regain, or maintain health continuously it was necessary for the individual to be taught to appreciate and recognize the particular complex of guiding sensations—somatic and visceral—associated with the use of his body, or vital engine, to total maximum mechanical efficiency, and to acquire the ability to promptly affect the coordinated action, necessary so to use it, at first by attention, will power and practice, and afterwards automatically, as an unconscious habit.
>
> The two chief mechanisms concerned and requiring attention were:
>
> (1) The postural or equilibrium mechanism—that for maintaining the weight of the body in the normal orthograde or perfect erect posture, with the least expenditure of power against the force of gravitation.
> (2) The respiratory mechanism.

Simultaneous maximum efficiency use of these mechanisms secured through the integrating action of the well-trained nervous system, could be made to give a degree of assistance to the circulation, digestion, absorption, nutrition, and neural and muscular tone to a degree, he believed, hitherto quite unsuspected. Not only was power saved for the neurons, but their nutrition and tone were increased. There was not only lessened expenditure of income, but augmentation of capital. The vital engine worked at total maximum efficiency. The power or energy generated for the work of the body was ample. The constituent organs of the vital machine were not worn out prematurely by relative displacements of parts and consequent excessive friction, pressure etc. against each other. Its component tissues and cells were not irritated into congestion and impaired vitality, favouring the lodgment and invasion of germs, nor were they stimulated into overgrowth and formation of tumours. There was no unnecessary expenditure of power on nervous and muscular activity, indicated by: rigidity, strain and effort.[36]

I. The Postural or Equilibrium Mechanism

Herbert Spencer had referred to: "That gravitative force which is the chief resistance to be met by terrestrial animals."[37] This has preeminent significance for man, who stands and progresses on one end of his longitudinal axis with the centre of gravity of his body poised high over a small base of support. Any movement of his body as a whole, or relative displacement of internal parts, tends to shift the centre of gravity outside the base of support, and the postural mechanism has to be incessantly at work to maintain the perfect erect or normal orthograde posture. It is clearly to man's advantage to avoid rigidity, strain, and effort.

There was no unnecessary consumption or waste of power on avoidable internal work, so that the structure of the vital engine was

36. Robert H. Scanes Spicer, "A New Cardinal Principle in the Treatment of Disease, and its Application in Disorders of the Nose, Throat, Voice and Speech," *The Medical Press and Circular* (February 9, 1910), 135.

37. Herbert Spencer (1820–1903); *Principles of Biology*, Vol. 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), 126.

preserved to the utmost degree, to effect this with the least expenditure of power. This he should do by arranging that the weight of the body is borne to the maximum degree by the appropriate mechanical structures of the body, the bony and cartilaginous skeleton and the ligaments. Under these conditions a minimum expenditure of power is needed to maintain that posture, or from it to start a new activity, and there is no undue local rigidity, stiffness or strain. He would define the normal orthograde posture as that posture in which the centre of gravity of the head is vertically over the centre of the base of support, and in which these two points are distanced as much as possible from each other, the line of gravity joining these points bisecting the median transverse, occipito-condyloid, and inter-cotyloid axes.

This is the ideal posture at which we should aim for every child, the one we should endeavour to get stereotyped by growth in form and structure, and it is the posture to which such child should automatically return, after action or relaxation. Such a subject has a straight back, raised and expanded thorax, well distanced from the pelvis, and flat abdomen. It does not follow that the postures permitted by some physical culturists, stiff, rigid, faulty copies of the above, really arrange the weight of the body in accordance with his definition. It is notoriously not so. It is just as easy to start a child right as wrong in this matter if proper care is taken. Further, this is the posture we should seek to give to our patients needing and seeking to know how to be well, that is, how to use their vital engine to maximum efficiency. Experience shows also that this posture is the one in which the respiratory mechanism has maximum efficiency, and from which its training should be commenced.

II. The Respiratory Mechanism

In maximum efficiency inspiration, the conscious and willed, or unconscious and habitual straightening of the vertebral column—leading to a raising and expanding of the thorax and to a passive tightening of the anterior abdominal wall kept the abdominal viscera in position as a fulcrum, for the centrifugal action of the domes of the diaphragm in expanding the base of the thorax. In this way the whole vertebro-thoracic mechanism, activated by the huge muscular masses of the spine and the diaphragm, acted as a vast suction-pump, not

only for the tidal air, but also for the evacuation of the portal venous system, as well as the systemic veins and lymphatics. Moreover, with reference to the weight of the thoracic and abdominal viscera, the same vertebro-thoracic mechanism acted as a powerful spring-crane, whose elastic pull varied with the ebb and flow of the respiratory tide, but which retained continuously the viscera in their proper place. In maximum efficiency expiration, there was no collapse of the spine or thorax, the anterior abdominal wall contracted and still further helped the circulation by acting as a force-pump.[38]

His cardinal principle sought total maximum efficiency of the whole engine by securing, in the first place, individual maximum efficiency of the postural and respiratory mechanisms. It was by no means unknown for cancer to disappear spontaneously, or for consumptives to get well. His views afford a rational explanation of how these occurrences might take place after some special mental or nervous stimulus, or some hitherto inexplicable constitutional volte-face. They suggested promising lines along which deliberate intentional efforts might be made by the physician to teach the patient to help the body to right itself, and so assist other treatment of proved value.[39]

To make the treatment effective it was of supreme importance to make a vivid first impression, and to rub it well in. For this reason the training must be individual and at first daily. The initial posture-sitting, standing, recumbent, etc.—selected, from which to start the training, should be a little less good than the patient's "best possible," and should gradually work up to the "normal" without fatigue. Any rigidity, stiffness, strain, or effort must be avoided; their persistence shows that progress is not being made. The in-breath must be absolutely silent and without effort. It was not possible even to enumerate all the essential practical details, but he would give a bird's-eye glimpse of the plan.[40]

The practitioner commenced by getting the patient to assume as good an approximation to the "perfect normal orthograde posture" as the latter could manage without undue strain, effort and fatigue. To attain success, incessant vigilance was required to see that the starting

38. Spicer, 135.

39. Spicer, 136.

40. Ibid.

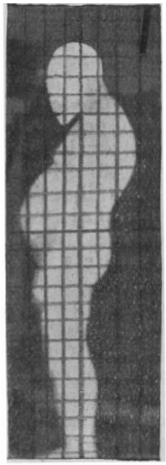


Fig. 1. Fig. 2.
Abdominal respiration (belly breathing). Head drooping forwards.

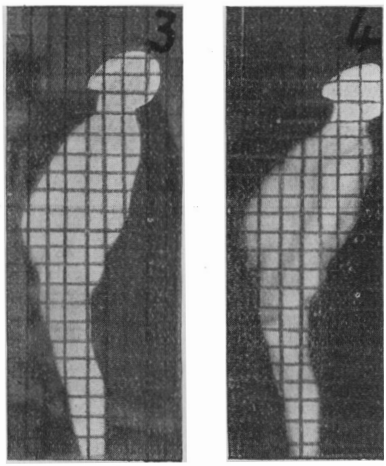


Fig. 3. Fig. 4.
Abdominal respiration (belly breathing). Head rigidly retracted.

In these photos from his paper "Some Points in the Mechanics of Respiration" Dr. Scanes Spicer contrasts diaphragmatic breathing (Figs. 1–4) with the correct, though "imperfectly performed," back breathing (Figs. 5–6). Spicer shows little understanding of Alexander's "antagonistic action," as he is taller on inspiration than expiration. By contrast, see photos of Alexander's standing poses on page 60.

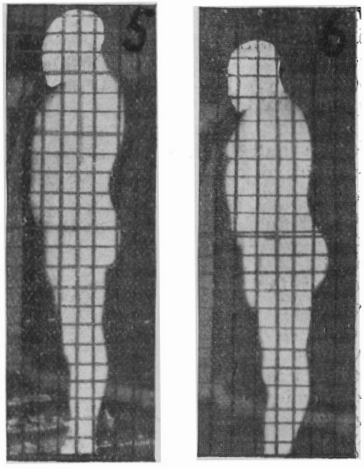


Fig. 5. Fig. 6.
Costal respiration (back breathing). Imperfectly performed by same subject, but indicating some of the essential points.

posture was accurately and precisely maintained by the patient. The latter gradually, but soon, got to feel, appreciate, and know by himself what was correct, and before long could assume that posture at will. The practitioner gradually and ultimately led the patient on, up to the

> perfect normal orthograde or maximum efficiency posture, and until the latter could hold it automatically.[41]
>
> The practitioner then went on to reform the voice entirely, commencing with a whispered production of the individual vowel sounds, and using a series of vowels such as can be found in any good elocution book.[42]

1910, APRIL: "A PROTEST AGAINST CERTAIN ASSUMPTIONS CONTAINED IN A LECTURE DELIVERED BY DR. R. H. SCANES SPICER"

Alexander wrote a pamphlet in response to Spicer, charging him with plagiarism. He compared quotes from Spicer's "Cardinal Principle" with quotes from his own writings dating back several years, including his letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The following excerpts underline Alexander's emphasis of his approach as an "educational method" whereas Spicer promotes a "treatment."

> Dr. Spicer's recommendations that the principles he advocates should only be taught by qualified medical men.…I am in complete disagreement for the following reasons.
>
> Every sound method of respiratory re-education, physical culture and voice training must be taught as an art and can be taught only by an artist who alone is able to comprehend an art and to pass on his comprehension to the neophyte. The eye of an artist is needed to apprehend the faults in a painting or in a work of sculpture, and, above all, the defects in a human body.[43]

Alexander's realization that his technique required the eye of an artist is not a dismissal of the accuracy of Spicer's descriptions. As a detailed account of the observable results of his teaching, they are of considerable value in assessing the early method and its results.

This was the end of the relationship between Alexander and his former sponsor, Spicer, but a progression in Alexander's development of his technique.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 137.

43. Alexander, "A Protest Against Certain Assumptions," in *Articles and Lectures*, 115.

CHAPTER III

1910–1914

1910: *MAN'S SUPREME INHERITANCE*

Moved by his break with Spicer, Alexander published his first book, *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, in October 1910. It was followed by *Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda* in March 1911, and *Conscious Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization*, in October 1912.

"In *Man's Supreme Inheritance*," Frank Pierce Jones writes, Alexander "made a quantum leap from therapy to philosophy."[1]

> Alexander's readings in anthropology and evolutionary thought combined with his observations of contemporary man brought him to the thesis that he advanced in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. Simply stated, the thesis is that "the great phase in man's advancement is that in which he passes from subconscious to conscious control of his mind and body."[2]

The 1910 *Man's Supreme Inheritance* included chapters on evolution, physical culture, the perils of deep-breathing and relaxation, his differences with the New Thought movement and faith healers in general, but few references to the practical particulars of his technique.

Evolution was intellectually fashionable following the Darwin centenary in 1909. John Dewey, who wouldn't make Alexander's acquaintance until 1915, writes about Darwin's far-reaching impact in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (1910):

> In laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanency, in treating the forms that had been regarded as types of fixity and perfection

1. Frank Pierce Jones, *Freedom to Change: The Development and Science of the Alexander Technique* (London: Mouritz, 1997), 23.

2. Ibid, 24.

> as originating and passing away, the *Origin of Species* introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics, and religion.[3]

Dewey's perspective is part of the inspiration for this book, reminding us (in my own words) that:

> **Process**
> **not immutability**
> **is the primary feature**
> **of reality.**

1910, APRIL: "SUPPLEMENT TO RE-EDUCATION OF THE KINAESTHETIC SYSTEMS CONCERNED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROBUST WELL-BEING"

Earlier in 1910, Alexander had published a Supplement to his 1908 *Re-education of the Kinaesthetic Systems*, which describes hands on the back of the chair, an early form of what would be named "monkey" by his trainees, and also a door exercise. Both of these are worth practicing.

> **Chair Exercise (Standing)**
>
> A chair with a fairly high back is required. The exact height depends entirely upon the particular defects to be eradicated. Ask the pupil to stand at the back of the chair in such a position that he (the pupil) will be able easily to reach the top of the back of the chair with his hands.
>
> When the pupil is standing behind the chair the teacher should place his (the teacher's) hand upon the pupil in such a manner that he will be able to manipulate to the best possible advantage.
>
> Then the teacher must ask the pupil to rehearse or give the mental orders necessary to the particular person in question, and such mental orders or desires must be those which will be in accordance with the correct movements which the teacher will ensure for the pupil during the manipulation which follows.
>
> The orders before referred to being given, the teacher will cause the pupil's body to incline forward and upward in the direction of the

3. John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1910), 1–2.

chair and then cause the pupil to place his hands, some distance apart, upon the back of the chair. The hands are to be so placed that the four fingers are kept quite straight on one side of the back of the chair and the thumb on the other side of the back of the chair.

Then the pupil should be told to order or desire relaxation of the muscles of the arm and to grip the back of the chair gently but firmly.

Then the pupil must be asked to pull the top of the chair as if endeavoring to lift it and at the same time allowing the right elbow to point directly towards the right and the left elbow towards the left. This pulling movement is employed in the support of the body in such a manner as to bring into use the proper muscular co-ordinations and to prevent the defective use previously employed.

It will be found that the pupil will be inclined, more or less to endeavor to support the body by stiffening the arms. When the teacher has succeeded in causing the pupil to pull in such a manner as to support the body in the required mechanical position, he can then proceed to cause the pupil to rehearse the correct orders.

The teacher will then bring about the activities of the respiratory and other processes.

In this exercise it is essential that the pupil does not attempt consciously to bend forward to the chair when he extends his arms to take a grip of the top of the chair. The movement forward and upward towards the chair must be secured while the pupil gently pulls the chair to support the body and causes the upper part of the arm and the forearm to approximate more closely by using the elbow as a hinge.

Door Exercise (Standing)

The pupil should stand from six to twelve inches from the door in accordance with the requirements of the particular individual. The teacher should then inform him that he wishes his (the pupil's) hips to move towards the door until the body is supported by the door and the torso extends away from it at an angle of about 25 to 30 degrees.

It will be found that most pupils will stiffen the legs in order to put the hips back towards the door. This stiffening is incorrect. The teacher should then explain to the pupil that when he is standing near the door in the upright position previous to the attempt to cause the hips to move back to the door, there is a continuous energy being sent

to the different muscles which enables him to stand in that upright position.

All that is necessary is that the pupil shall, as it were, **cut off the energy** which causes the firm position at the hip joints and other parts, and by ordering or desiring the relaxation of the parts concerned so that the hinge-like movements of the hips takes place and the teacher with his hands placed upon the pupil causes his (the pupil's) body to move in the right direction.

When the body, in the region of the hips, has touched the door and the torso is leaning forward, at the angle of about twenty to thirty degrees, the teacher should then ask the pupil to order his neck to relax and his head to move forward, while the teacher causes the torso to move backwards until it is supported by the door.

The pupil should then be asked to order the body and neck to relax and the head to move forward and upward, while he (the teacher) causes the body to be correctly supported by the door and brings about the correct and adequate movements of the different muscular mechanisms.[4]

In Marjory Barlow's *An Examined Life*, she refers to the "wall exercise" as taught by Alexander. In Victorian times, wallpaper was ubiquitous and often elaborate and expensive. Hence the use of the door rather than the wall.

He taught us all to do wall work, but that was mainly in the class. He didn't do it a lot with his private pupils. He taught it more as a technique for the teachers to help keep themselves in order while teaching. You know when you've a heavy teaching day, it may not be possible to lie down. Using the wall, sliding down, following your directions and going up and down the wall, you can have a reference for your lengthening and widening your verticality. It helps keep the teacher in order while teaching. He used it a lot in his class, but not as much in private lessons. But each teacher develops what they find most useful for their

4. F. Matthias Alexander, "Supplement to Re-education of the Kinaesthetic Systems Concerned with the Development of Robust Well-Being," in *Articles and Lectures: Articles, Published Letters and Lectures on the F.M. Alexander Technique,* ed. Jean M. O. Fischer (London: Mouritz 1995), 103–105.

> pupils. That's why there is so much variation. I've never been a great wall person, but Bill was—I think he found that a very useful one.[5]

"Bill" (Wilfred Barlow, Marjory's husband) gave two accounts of the wall exercise. The second account was different from the first; Marjory had possibly suggested a revision. Contrast the simplicity of Alexander's "Door Exercise," with Barlow's versions that were accompanied by figures of an armless skeleton, knees bent, back against wall, and then inclined forward about 30 degrees.

> Alexander frequently wrote of a "position of mechanical advantage." An easy way to achieve this is to slide your back down a wall, at the same time putting your knees away and flexing your pelvis so that the whole back is flat against the wall. If the entire spine from head to pelvis is now kept lengthening, it can be inclined forward but with the buttocks still touching the wall. In this situation, the directions are: "Head forward and up, back lengthen and widen, knees forward and apart," and, in addition, the neck can be directed to lengthen "up and back" and the lumbar spine likewise up and back. The shoulder blades will now move around the chest more easily, so that when the back is returned to the wall, they remain relatively widened apart. And it will be seen that the unduly arched back has now become straighter.
>
> Throughout this maneuver, attention is given to inhibiting and projecting the new body-construct, which includes the orders to the knees and ankles and elbows and hands. Such detailed attention leads to a heightened awareness of the coordination of the whole body. Most subjects will experience an exhilarating feeling of lightness and "up-ness" in their bodies as they begin thus to engage their minds.[6]

At the end of his "Supplement to Re-education of the Kinaesthetic Systems" Alexander turns his attention to vocalization.

> **In Connection with Vocalization**
>
> It will be found that all vocal peculiarities and defects are associated with an imperfect mode of opening the mouth and imperfect use of the tongue and lips.

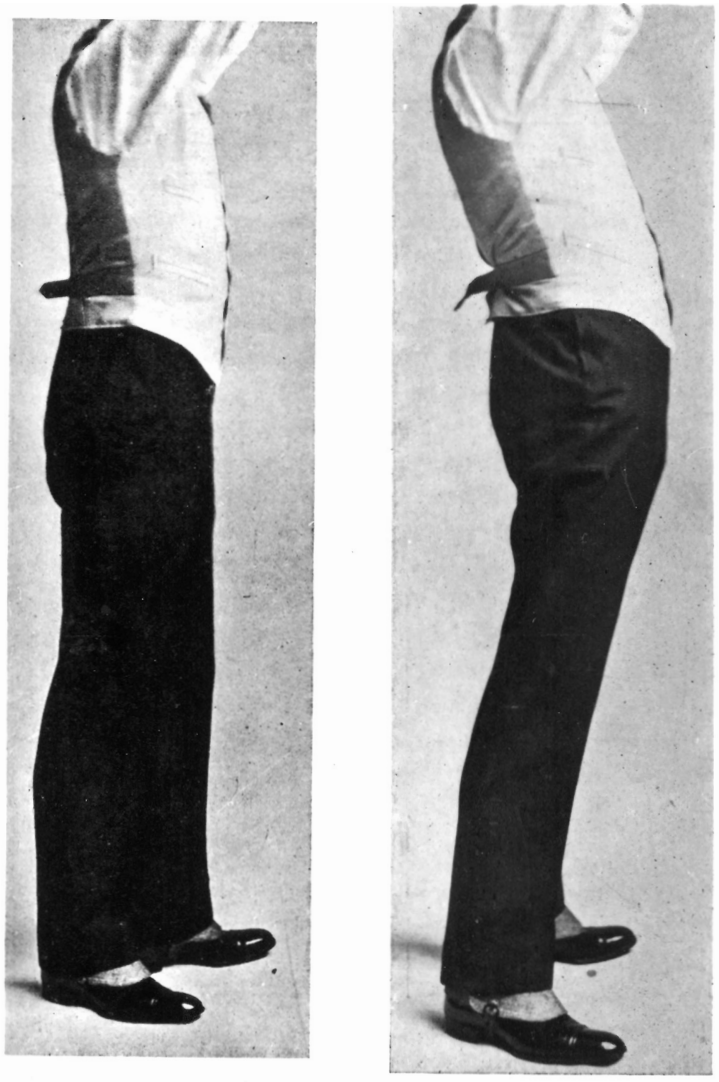
5. Marjory Barlow, *An Examined Life* (San Francisco: Mornum Time Press, 2002), 205.
6. Wilfred Barlow, *The Alexander Technique* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 181–182.

> **Before attempting to eradicate these defects the pupil must have made very considerable progress with the foregoing and other exercises**.
>
> The teacher must now thoroughly explain the mental principles involved. He must ask the pupil simply to rehearse the orders he dictates to him (the pupil) and the teacher must, with his hands, bring about the correct movement of the jaw and tongue and in the region of the throat, while the pupil simply rehearses the orders.
>
> As an example: the pupil should rehearse the order for the relaxation of the neck and the raising of the head while the teacher opens his (the pupil's) mouth, while all the parts concerned are caused to co-ordinate correctly.[7]

Alexander's 1910 "Supplement" reminds us of an important point, frequently overlooked: the "whispered ah" should be preceded by establishing a position of mechanical advantage. As Spicer reported in "A New Cardinal Principle": first establish "normal orthograde posture" then proceed with "respiratory re-education" and vocal training, beginning with whispered vowel sounds.[8]

The photos of Alexander's "correct standing position" were first published in October 1910 in *The Onlooker* by a reviewer who had lessons with Alexander.[9] They were republished in 1911 (*Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda*) and 1918 (*Man's Supreme Inheritance,* 2nd edition). The importance of the "correct standing position" was not understood by Spicer, as can be seen in his photos where he demonstrates back breathing. He appears taller on inspiration—no "antagonistic action" on the exhale—and the position of his feet is not that recommended by Alexander.[10]

7. Alexander, "Supplement to Re-education of the Kinaesthetic Systems Concerned with the Development of Robust Well-Being" in *Articles and Lectures,* 105.
8. See Chapter II, Spicer's "A New Cardinal Principle in the Treatment of Disease, and Its Application in Disorders of the Nose, Throat, Voice and Speech." Note that Spicer's whispered exercises are not the same as Alexander's whispered ah. See photo of Spicer on page 52.
9. See Appendix I.
10. See Chapter II, page 52.



A B

A.A. THE FEET ARE HERE PLACED IN THE IDEAL POSITION FOR OBTAINING PERFECT EQUILIBRIUM OF THE HUMAN MACHINE, AND FOR PERMITTING THE MAXIMUM ACTIVITY OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE WHOLE ORGANISM. NOTE.—IT IS EVIDENT THAT EITHER THE RIGHT OR LEFT FOOT MAY BE IN ADVANCE WITHOUT AFFECTING THE CORRECTNESS OF THE POSE

These photos of Alexander demonstrating both correct and incorrect standing positions were originally published in *The Onlooker* in 1910 and later included in the 1918 expanded edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. Alexander shows that the placing of the feet in the correct standing position allows for both a "stable pose and a ready pivot and fulcrum" and avoids the common tendencies to "hollow and shorten the back and to protrude the stomach."

THE WHISPERED AH

Jones gives a full description of the "whispered ah" in *Freedom to Change*, from the perspective of Alexander's later teaching.

> One of the procedures the Alexanders developed at this time is what they called "the whispered ah." As they used it in their teaching, it is an extremely effective device for demonstrating the role of inhibition in breathing and voice production. After a pupil has gained sufficient conscious control so that he can follow a set of instructions without shortening neck muscles and changing the axis of his head, he is asked (1) to notice where his tongue is and to leave it with the tip touching his lower teeth; (2) to smile by thinking of something funny (a stage smile will not do) in order to relax his lips and free the passages leading to the throat; (3) to open his mouth by letting the lower jaw move forward and down (gravity should do most of the work) and not by tilting the head back; (4) to produce the sound of "ah" in a whisper (a sound chosen because it was not associated with ordinary bad habits of vocalization); (5) to close the lips and let air come in through the nose. The Alexanders maintained that they did not use exercises, but they made an exception in the case of the "whispered ah" because it is primarily an exercise in inhibition and "non-end-gaining." The pupil's attention, which has been expanded to take in the head-neck-trunk relation, is focused on each sequential event in turn and is not allowed to jump ahead to the end to be gained, the whispered sound, which is merely one event in the series, without any more or less importance than the others.
>
> With his attention organized in this way the pupil can detect and inhibit any unnecessary tension or effort like lifting his chest or depressing it, or tilting back his head and sucking in air, which has grown around the acts of breathing and voice production and become unconscious and habitual. Taking a breath, it should be noted, comes not at the beginning but at the end of the sequence and then is allowed to take place reflexly. The procedure is not difficult to master. It can be varied by substituting other sounds, either whispered or voiced. And it can be used as a model for studying and improving the performance

> of other activities in which reflex and voluntary elements are imperfectly integrated.[11]

Walter Carrington offers his own recollection of the development of the natural smile:

> With regard to **the whispered *ah*, this was evolved** when a singing teacher called Mr. Lawrence pointed out that the perfect *ah* required the removal of the upper lip from the teeth. This naturally resulted in an ugly grimace. F.M. then got the idea of a natural smile to achieve the same result.[12]

And Kitty Wielopolska shares this anecdote from her training:

> We don't know whether he did his work every day in front of the mirror. I think he did, because of the time that I mentioned to you when we'd been in the class a year and a half and he came prancing in saying: "I've got it! I've got it!—with the 'whispered Ah's—you must think of something funny, and let the smile come from the thought." So he must have been working and thinking about how to go on improving and clarifying his discoveries, not just writing his books.[13]

In *The Use of the Self* (1932), Alexander reflects at length on the relationship between his voice and his whole self.

> I came to see that any attempt to maintain my lengthening when reciting not only involved on my part the prevention of the wrong use of certain specific parts, but that this attempt also involved my bringing into play the use of all those parts of the organism required for the activities incident to the act of reciting, such as standing, walking, using the arms or hands for gesture, interpretation, etc.
>
> Observation in the mirror showed me that when I was standing to recite I was using these other parts in certain wrong ways which

11. Jones, 21–22.

12. Walter H. M. Carrington, *A Time To Remember: A Personal Diary of Teaching the F.M. Alexander Technique in 1946* (London: Sheildrake Press, 1996), 27.

13. Catharine Wielopolska, *Never Ask Why: The Life-Adventure of Kitty Wielopolska as told to Joe Armstrong* (Denmark: Novis Publications, 2001), 28.

> synchronized with my wrong way of using my head and neck, larynx, vocal and breathing organs, and which involved a condition of undue muscle tension throughout my organism. I observed that this condition of undue muscle tension affected particularly the use of my legs, feet and toes, my toes being contracted and bent downwards in such a way that my feet were unduly arched, my weight thrown more on to the outside of my feet than it should have been, and my balance interfered with.

He recalls the early instruction given to him to "take hold of the floor with your feet!":

> On discovering this, I thought back to see if I could account for it, and I recalled an instruction that had been given to me in the past by the late Mr. James Cathcart (at one time a member of Mr. Charles Kean's Company) when I was taking lessons from him in dramatic expression and interpretation. Not being pleased with my way of standing and walking, he would say to me from time to time, "Take hold of the floor with your feet." He would then proceed to show me what he meant by this, and I did my best to copy him, believing that if I was told what to do to correct something that was wrong, I should be able to do it and all would be well. I persevered and in time believed that my way of standing was now satisfactory, because I thought I was "taking hold of the floor with my feet" as I had seen him do.
>
> *The belief is very generally held that if only we are told what to do in order to correct a wrong way of doing something, we can do it, and that if we feel we are doing it, all is well. All my experience, however, goes to show that this belief is a delusion.*
>
> On recalling this experience I continued with the aid of mirrors to observe the use of myself more carefully than ever, and came to realize that what I was doing with my legs, feet and toes when standing to recite was exerting a most harmful general influence upon the use of myself throughout my organism. This convinced me that the use of these parts involved an abnormal amount of muscle tension and was indirectly associated with my throat trouble, and I was strengthened in this conviction when I reminded myself that my teacher had found

it necessary in the past to try and improve my way of standing in order to get better results in my reciting. It gradually dawned upon me that the wrong way I was using myself when I thought I was "taking hold of the floor with my feet" was the same wrong way I was using myself when in reciting I pulled my head back, depressed my larynx, etc, and that this wrong way of using myself constituted a combined wrong use of the whole of my physical-mental mechanisms. I then realized that this was the use which I habitually brought into play for all my activities, that it was what I may call the "habitual use" of myself, and that my desire to recite, like any other stimulus to activity, would inevitably cause this habitual wrong use to come into play and dominate any attempt I might be making to employ a better use of myself in reciting.

The influence of this wrong use was bound to be strong because of its being habitual, but in my case it was greatly strengthened because during the past years I had undoubtedly been cultivating it through my efforts to carry out my teacher's instructions to "take hold of the floor with my feet" when I recited. The influence of the cultivated habitual use, therefore, acted as an almost irresistible stimulus to me to use myself in the wrong way I was accustomed to; this stimulus to general wrong use was far stronger than the stimulus of my desire to employ the new use of my head and neck, and I now saw that it was this influence which led me, as soon as I stood up to recite, to put my head in the opposite direction to that which I desired. I now had proof of one thing at least, that all my efforts up till now to improve the use of myself in reciting had been misdirected.[14]

1911, MARCH: *MAN'S SUPREME INHERITANCE ADDENDA*

In 1911, Alexander published *Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda,* offering his insights into a standing position, sitting and standing, and walking. When the second edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* was published, in 1918, these descriptions would be included in the chapter, "Notes and Instances."

Narrowing and arching of the back are exactly the opposite to what is required by nature, *widening of the back and a more normal and*

14. F.M. Alexander, *The Use of the Self* (London: Orion Books, 2001), 32–34.

extended position of the spine. If these conditions of the back be first secured, the neck and arms will no longer be stiffened and other faults will be eradicated.[15]

The primary principle involved in attaining a correct standing position is the placing of the feet in that position which will ensure their greatest effect as base, pivot and fulcrum, and thereby throw the limbs and trunk into that pose in which they may be correctly influenced and *aided* by the force of gravity. The weight of the body…rests chiefly upon the rear foot, and the hips should be allowed to go back as far as is possible without altering the balance effected by the position of the feet, and without deliberately throwing the body forward. This movement starts at the ankle, and affects particularly the joints of the ankles and hips. When inclining the body forward, there must be no bending of the spine or neck; from the hips upwards the relative positions of all parts of the torso must remain unchanged. When the position is assumed, it is further necessary for each person to bring about the proper lengthening of the spine and the adequate widening of the back. The latter needs due psycho-physical training.[16]

This standing position as now explained is physiologically correct as a primary factor in the act of walking. The weight is thrown largely upon the rear foot, and thus enables the other knee to be bent and the forward foot to be lifted; at the same time the ankle of the rear foot should be bent so that the whole body is inclined slightly forward, thus allowing the propelling force of gravitation to be brought into play.

The whole physiology of walking is, indeed, perfectly simple when once these fundamental principles are understood. It is really resolved into the primary movements of allowing the body to incline forward from the ankle on which the weight is supported and then preventing oneself from falling by allowing the weight to be taken in turn by the foot which has been advanced. This method, simple as it may appear, is not, however, the one usually adopted. The mechanical disadvantage displayed in what is known as the "rolling gait" for instance, a gait which is common enough, is absolutely impossible when the

15. F. Matthias Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance: Conscious Guidance and Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* (London: Mouritz, 1996), 170.

16. Ibid, 171.

instructions given are carefully followed. And the effect upon the whole mechanical mechanism of the person concerned is shown by the fact that when the co-ordinating principles brought about by this method are established, there is a constant tendency for the torso to lengthen, whereas the usual tendency—due to faulty standing position and the incorrect co-ordinations which follow—is for the torso to shorten.

Nearly every one I examine or observe in the act of walking employs unnecessary physical tension in the process in such a way that there is a tendency to shorten the spine and legs, by pressing—if I may so put it familiarly—down through the floor "**taking hold of the floor with the feet**" instead of, as it were lightening that pressure by lengthening the body and throwing the weight forward and moving lightly and freely. In consequence of the "shortening" and "pressing down" just referred to, the civilized peoples are becoming more and more flat-footed. The properly co-ordinated person employs a due amount of tension in such a way that the tendency of the spine and legs is to lengthen, and the equilibrium is such that the undue pressure through the floor is absent, and there is a lightness and freedom in the movements of such a person that is most noticeable. The person who is flat-footed has only to establish these conditions to restore the natural arch of the flat foot.

We can find, perhaps, no better instance of the necessity for the application of the principles of conscious control to these fundamental and essential propositions of standing, walking and running, than in the photographs taken of Dorando as he appeared when he was making his last terrible efforts to reach the tape at the conclusion of the Marathon Race in London in 1908. One sees that he was desperately wearied, and that whatever conscious control of his muscular habits he may ever have obtained, he was at this moment completely under the domination of subconscious (or subjective) control, that he was "out of communication with his reason." His body, as we see him in these photographs, is thrown back from the hips, his arms are outstretched behind him, and his legs are bent forward at the knee.

In *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, Alexander laments the "subconscious control" evident in the marathoner, Dorando Pietri, who struggled to reach the finish line at the 1908 London Olympics. From a newspaper report of the time: "There was a truly sensational climax in the Stadium yesterday to the great Marathon Race. By five o'clock, there was hardly a vacant space to be seen, and the vast gathering had worked itself up to a state of breathless excitement. When the first man to reach the Stadium, who proved to be the Italian, Dorando, was seen to be practically exhausted, and fell four times in attempting to cover the prescribed distance round the track, the crowds were spellbound. Misguided enthusiasts helped him to rise, and actually escorted him to the tape, as seen above. This lost him the race, for Hayes (USA) who finished second, lodged a protest which was upheld by the judges." (Popperfoto/Getty Images)

As a consequence, he is compelled to use almost all his physical force in order to save himself from falling backwards. He is struggling against a tremendous gravitational pull which is dragging him away from his goal. If Dorando, magnificent athlete as he undoubtedly was, had been trained in the principles of conscious control, such an attitude would have been impossible for him, tired and exhausted as he was. For if he had not been subconsciously controlled, he would have employed his common sense at this moment and would have acted according to the guidance of its mandate. It is at such critical moments

that we have urgent need for the control of reason, for it is then that we suffer most from the loss of the animal equivalent—instinct.

Dorando's muscles may have been taxed to their utmost capacity, but if he had been consciously controlled he would have leaned forward, not back, and while he had the strength necessary (but a very small part of the strength he was actually expending) to prevent himself from falling on his face, that gravitational force would have dragged him on instead of dragging him back from the object of his achievement, as was actually the case. He would, in short, have been able to make the best instead of the worst use of his powers.

Faults such as we see exaggerated in this instance are to be found in the carriage of many people today, and the fact is one of great importance to medical men. Patients are constantly advised to take walking exercise, although in many cases that exercise undoubtedly does more harm than good. In my opinion it is very essential that all doctors should devote more attention to this subject than they are devoting at the present time, in order that they may be in a position to advise which of their patients will be benefited by taking walking exercise, and which of them by so doing will aggravate the troubles from which they are suffering. For it should be evident, I think, that the good effects of fresh air and gentle exercise will be practically nullified if the patient can only obtain them by exaggerating and perpetuating the defects which have led him to the prescription.[17]

These same rules are equally applicable in principle to the acts of sitting and rising from a sitting position. Very few people have the right conception of the "means whereby" of these acts or of the correct use of the parts which should be employed in their performance, and this despite the fact that we are performing these acts continually, and with such apparent ease from our own point of view. If you ask any of your friends to sit down, you will notice, if you observe their actions closely, that in nearly all cases there is undue increase of muscular tension in the body and lower limbs; in many cases the arms are actually employed. As a rule, however, the most striking action is the alteration in the position of the head, which is thrown back, whilst the neck is stiffened and shortened.

17. Alexander, 171–174.

Now I will describe the correct method, but it must be borne in mind that it is useless to give what I here call "orders" to the muscular mechanism, until the original habit and the principle of mental conception connected with this action have been eradicated. If for instance, before giving any of the "orders" which follow, the experimenter has already fixed in his mind that he is to go through the performance of sitting down, as that performance is known to him, this suggestion will at once call into play all the old vicious co-ordinations, and the new orders will never influence the mechanisms to which they are directed, because those mechanisms will already be imperfectly employed, and will be held in their old routine by the force of the familiar suggestion.

Firstly then, rid the mind of the idea of sitting down, and consider the exercise and each order independently of the final consequence they entail. In other words study the "means" not the "end."

Secondly, stand in the position already described as the **correct standing position**, with the back of the legs almost touching the seat of the chair.

Thirdly, order the neck to relax, and at the same time order the head forward and up. (Note that to "order" the muscles of the neck to relax does not mean "allow the head to fall forward on the chest." The order suggested is merely a mental preventive to the erroneous preconceived idea.)

Fourthly, keep clearly in the mind the general idea of the lengthening of the body which is a direct consequence of the third series of orders.

Fifthly, order simultaneously the hips to move backwards and the knees to bend, the knees and hip-joints acting as hinges. During this act a mental order must be given to widen the back. When this order is fulfilled, the experimenter will find himself sitting in the chair. But he is not yet upright, for the body will be inclined forward, unless he frustrates the whole performance at this point by giving his old orders to come up to an upright position.

Sixthly, then—and this is of great importance—pause for an instant in the position in which you will fall into the chair if the earlier instructions have been correctly followed, and then, after ordering the neck to relax and the head forward and up, the spine to lengthen, and

the back to widen, come back into the chair and to an upright position by using the hips as a hinge, and without shortening the back, stiffening the neck or throwing up the head.

The act of rising is merely a reversal of the foregoing. Draw the feet back so that one is slightly under the seat of the chair, allow the body to move forward from the hips, always keeping in mind the freedom of the neck and the idea of lengthening of the spine. Let the whole body come forward until the centre of gravity falls over the feet, that is to say, until the poise is such that if the chair were removed at this point, you would be left balanced in the position of a person performing the "frog dance," then, by the exercise of the muscles of the legs and back, straighten the legs at the hips, knees, and ankles, until the erect position is perfectly attained.

If you care to experiment on a friend in this act of rising, you will observe that in the movement as performed by an imperfectly coordinated person the same bad movements occur, tending to stiffen the neck, to arch the spine unduly, to shorten the body, and to protrude the abdominal wall.

This completes the coordinating idea with regard to **standing, walking, and sitting,** and the exercises indicated in the explanations I have made will be found exceedingly helpful as a first step towards a proper and healthful use of the muscular mechanisms **in these simple acts of everyday life**.[18]

1912, OCTOBER: *CONSCIOUS CONTROL IN RELATION TO HUMAN EVOLUTION IN CIVILIZATION*

In 1912, Alexander published another slim book *Conscious Control*, which would later be expanded into Part II of the second edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. At the time, *Conscious Control* was read and appreciated by three women who later became important to Alexander: Ethel Webb (*Teaching Aphorisms*, 1930s), Irene Tasker (*Connecting Links,* 1967) and Margaret Naumburg (*The Child and the World,* 1928). The three women were colleagues

18. Alexander, 174–175.

at the first Montessori International Training Course in Rome in 1913.[19] Shortly after *Conscious Control* was published, Ethel Webb came for a course of lessons and remained with Alexander as secretary and assistant for half a century. Irene Tasker became an assistant to Alexander and eventually mistress of the little school. Margaret Naumburg had lessons with Alexander in London and helped him establish teaching in New York during the winter months between 1914 and 1924.

In *Conscious Control,* under "Synopsis of Claim," Alexander advances four claims. The third one refers to Alexander's growing skill with his hands.

> (3) **I am able to re-adjust and to teach others to re-adjust the human machine with the hands**; to mould the body, as it were, into its proper shape, and with an open-minded pupil it is possible to remove many defects in a few minutes, as, for example, to change entirely the production of a voice, its quality and power.[20]

The following two years would bring about significant advancements in Alexander's use of his hands. In 1940, *Freedom to Change,* Jones recounts:

> **F.M. told me that in 1914 he was just beginning to find a new way of using his hands in teaching. By applying the inhibitory control** (which proved so effective in breathing and speaking) **to the use of his hands** he was learning to make changes in a pupil that were different from ordinary manipulation or postural adjustment.[21]

Alexander's lifelong friend and supporter, Andrew Rugg-Gunn, would reflect on Alexander's skill with "palpation" in a book that he prepared for publication after Alexander's death.[22] It's worth quoting at length.

> Shape is perceptible to and is appraised by the eye, supplemented by touch; surface texture by touch, supplemented by the eye. Both eye and touch must be trained. The trained eye is a familiar concept, but

19. Maria Montessori (1870–1952) was an Italian academic educator, who pioneered theories in early childhood education still implemented in Montessori schools around the globe.

20. Alexander, 119.

21. Jones, 31.

22. Rugg-Gunn never published his book. The concluding chapters are published in *Mature Consideration of the Work of F.M. Alexander,* ed. Alexander Murray, booklet (Alexander Technique Center Urbana: 2002).

the trained touch, is more difficult to define. It involves the sense of touch, but it includes much more, and is better described, as in clinical medicine, by the word 'palpation.'

Certain secrets of the living body are revealed only through palpation by the educated hand. For in the living body there is an individual organic consistency, the proper elasticity and spring of the organism as a working whole, which reveals to the experienced hand its state of internal equilibrium and adjustment, the quality of its functioning, and its general organic well-being, i.e. its integration as a whole or the reverse. This natural resiliency or plasticity is an expression of the distribution of parts, particularly of the axial elements of the body; of the free play of elastic structures; of the optimal (or sub-optimal) level of muscle tonus and its substratum of nervous energy neuromuscular system serving posture and movement. It is an index of the dynamic state of the organism, a tactile sign of an indwelling harmony and grace. It is an index, however, which few possess the ability to assess. Much knowledge and experience underlie the correct interpretation of these perceptions.

Closely correlated with the feel of the body by perceptive hands is its objective shape, which also is an index of importance not only for the individual but for the species. Form follows function. It is evident, therefore, that the shape characteristic of any species is a norm around which individual variations fluctuate, and that there is an optimal shape for the individual within this range. It follows, further, that a technique of individual re-integration must restore both the inner consistency and the outer shape which is optimal for that individual.

Matthias Alexander possessed this quality of palpation to a supreme degree. His insight into the living body had the quality of genius, the product of natural endowment and great experience. Alexander's mode of palpation must not be misunderstood. His aim was not the exploration of anatomical structures but an assessment of physical and physiological forces, their distribution within the body and their collective co-operation to one end. This end is the integration of the whole man, and is based ultimately on the efficient use of man's complete anti-gravity mechanism. Alexander's conception of the body as an indivisible unity, with function as the unifying force,

> and the sense of touch which defines it, underlay his technique and explain his success as a re-educator.[23]

In 1914, feedback was an obscure term from electrical engineering and likely unknown to Alexander.[24] Yet much of Alexander's development during this period can be seen as providing feedback to his students: a book, placed at the back of the chair, provides feedback to the shoulder girdle, as does the door to the pelvis in the door exercise. The contact of the hand with the chair gives feedback on the use of the hands, as the whispered vowel gives feedback to the use of breath and voice. Alexander's new use of his hands in teaching provides feedback to the student in the preparation to act and in a new experience of moving.

Alexander's new use of his hands is but one indicator of the increasing importance of inhibition to the work. In the "Thesis" portion of *Conscious Control*, Alexander enumerates the "four essential stages" of any action performed by conscious guidance and control:

> (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.[25]

This ordering of the stages—conception, inhibition, new orders, movement—may have been the basis of the work of Alexander's brother, A.R., his sister,

23. Andrew Rugg-Gunn, "The Technique of Re-Integration," in *Mature Consideration of the Work of F.M. Alexander,* ed. Alexander Murray, booklet (Alexander Technique Center Urbana, 2002), 5–6.

24. The term feedback became widespread with Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics: Or the Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine* (1948); connecting control (actions taken in *hope* of achieving goals) with communication (connection and information flowing between the actor and the environment), pointing out that effective action requires communication. Knowing whether you have reached your goal, or at least are getting closer to it, requires "feedback."

25. Alexander, 124.

Amy Alexander (Mechin, 1913), and possibly Lilian Twycross, in Melbourne, who advertised in 1900 that she was "certificated" by F. Matthias Alexander.[26]

By the time he published *The Use of the Self* (1932), Alexander's understanding of the process of change would grow richer. In Ron Brown's *Authorised Summaries* chapter "The Evolution of a Technique," there is a meaningful change in the sequence of steps: inhibition, once the second step, now becomes the first. Here is the action plan Alexander chose to follow:

(1) **to inhibit any immediate response to the stimulus to speak**.
(2) **to project the new, reasoned directions for the primary control**
(3) **to continue projecting them** until he was sufficiently familiar with them to gain his end by their use.
(4) while still projecting the new directions he would **stop and reconsider** whether he would after all respond to the stimulus, and then:
(5) either:
    (a) decide not to respond, but continue to project the new directions

or

    (b) change his end and, for example, **raise his hand** instead of speaking, but continue to project the new directions,

or:

    (c) go on to gain the original end (to speak) by means of the new directions.

This plan, by concentrating on the critical moment when the directions changed over to action, submitted the instinctive processes of direction to an entirely new experience, and the decision to gain a certain end resulted in a new kind of activity, which was capable of gaining not only that, but any other consciously desired end.

By using this plan he found that his instinctive response remained inhibited throughout, while his directions for the new use were being projected. He began to be able to defeat the habitual wrong use by his new reasoned use, and the marked improvement in his reciting, and

26. Rosslyn McLeod, *Up From Down Under: The Australian Origins of Frederick Matthias Alexander and the Alexander Technique* (Broadoak, Dorset: Creeds Ltd., 1995), 62.

> in his vocal, respiratory and nasal troubles proved that he had found a successful method of improving his functioning.[27]

The Use of the Self offers us a "history of the investigations which led to the evolution of the Alexander Technique." The differences between the first chapter of *The Use of the Self* and his 1912 book *Conscious Control* suggest that "The Evolution of a Technique" is as much an account of Alexander's experiments and discoveries just prior to 1914, as a description of his vocal difficulties going back to 1892.

Alexander's work had evolved a great deal in the ten years since coming to London in 1904. He arrived teaching a *New Method of Respiratory Vocal Re-education* (1906) based on establishing the "normal orthograde posture," then, using positions of mechanical advantage (1908) and antagonistic action, proceeding finally to whispered vowel sounds. By 1910, he had added the book, door and chair exercises. And by 1914, he had developed a "new use of his hands." His discoveries, and success in imparting them prior to 1914, are the basis of his technique. Refinement in communicating and changing his "use" of himself while teaching began in 1914.

27. Ron Brown, *Authorised Summaries of F.M. Alexander's Four Books* (London: STAT Books, 1992), 81–82.

CHAPTER IV

1914–1923

1914: NEW YORK

Alexander arrived in New York in September 1914, one month after the start of World War I. Margaret Naumburg was instrumental in helping him establish his practice, acquiring teaching rooms at the Essex Hotel and connecting him with his first pupils. His practice was so successful that by the end of the year he had asked Ethel Webb to join him to help him meet the demand.[1]

One of the earliest accounts of Alexander's teachings comes from one of his New York students, James Harvey Robinson.[2] When *Man's Supreme Inheritance* was published in the United States in 1918, Robinson wrote a long review in *The Atlantic Monthly* titled "The Philosopher's Stone."

> In his book Mr. Alexander describes as best he can the manner in which he gives lessons in conscious control, and at the same time so remodels the body that the patient is finally able to translate his new aspirations into daily conduct. He realizes that the psychic and physical are always interplaying, sometimes obviously, usually unconsciously. One has to inhibit his familiar and quite unconscious muscular routine, in order to make way for the new, well-planned, conscious coordination. It seems to me to be Mr. Alexander's fundamental invention to have hit upon an effective way of doing this. You are first shown your general incompetence to disassociate and control your movements: then you are given certain fundamental orders in regard to the relaxing of the

1. Michael Bloch, *The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander: Founder of the Alexander Technique* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 98–100
2. James Harvey Robinson (1863–1936) was a U.S. historian, one of the founders of the "new history," broadening historical scholarship in relation to the social sciences. He taught at Columbia University and was prominent in the founding of the New School for Social Research in New York.

neck, the position of the head, the lengthening of the body and broadening of the back. These are, however, at first *mere aspirations,* and you are forbidden to make any attempt to carry them out muscularly, for the simple reason that your old habits will not permit you to do so. As yet you do not know what it is really to relax the neck, lengthen the body, or broaden the back; but you can cultivate the hope of accomplishing these feats in good time. Mr. Alexander has discovered from experience that the *bare orders,* if often repeated, not only tend to cut out the old noxious strains and distortions, but have an essential positive influence in forwarding the substitution of the new and correct coordination.

Mr. Alexander then proceeds literally to remodel the patient, **first sitting and then in a standing posture.** He devotes his chief attention to the neck, lower thorax, and abdomen, but sees to it that one's legs are properly relaxed. By pressing, pulling, stretching, and readjusting—all quite gently and persuasively—he brings you back into shape, rising now and then to take a look at you from a distance, as a sculptor might view the progress of his work. This process has a double effect, apparently: it gradually increases your muscular discrimination, and at the same time the correct co-ordinations he makes tend to hold over and ultimately to become habitual. Slowly you realize that the sensations in your back and your consequent control are increasing. You sit and stand with ever greater ease and satisfaction. You learn to discriminate and separate muscular acts; to give yourself a long succession of commands and carry them out one by one, without involving any but the necessary and correct co-ordinations—**to grasp a chair without implicating the muscles of the upper arm or shoulder, to manage your legs without using the abdominal muscles or contracting the neck**.

When one is properly coordinated, gratuitous strain disappears; the lung capacity is greatly increased, the method of breathing improves, the abdominal viscera are no longer compressed, and the natural massage in which our intestines engage can be carried on freely, thus aiding in the elimination of the poisonous products of life which cause such varied distress, physical and emotional. At last one has learned to: "brace up" and what is more, to stay up; to prefer the right posture to the wrong. And one enjoys all these advantages for

twenty-four hours in the day; for one no longer suffers from the "re-absorption" that so often makes sleep a disappointment.[3]

1915: JOHN DEWEY

In 1915, John Dewey's wife and daughter studied with Alexander and, in the winter of 1916, Dewey himself came for lessons.

Alexander describes one of Dewey's early visits in an anonymous example from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*.

> A pupil of mine, an author, had been in a serious state of health for some time, and had at last reached the point where he was unable to carry on his literary work. After finishing his latest book he passed through a crisis which was described as a "breakdown," with the result that even a few hours of work caused him great fatigue and brought on a state of painful depression. From the outset of his lessons, therefore, I expressly stipulated that he should *stop* and make a break at the end of each half-hour's writing, and should then either do fifteen minutes of respiratory re-education, or take a walk in the open air before resuming his writing.
>
> One afternoon he came to his lesson unusually depressed and enervated, and, in response to my enquiries, he admitted that he had been indulging in his literary work that morning from nine till one without a break, in spite of my express stipulation that he must make frequent breaks. I pointed out to him that if he had been continuing his work for four hours without a break, we could not be surprised at the unfortunate result, for, as I explained to him, during deep thought, as in sleep, the activity of the respiratory processes is reduced to a minimum, a very harmful minimum in his case, owing to the inadequacy of his intra-thoracic capacity, this latter condition being one of the symptoms of his breakdown. "But I am unable to stop when once I get into my work," said my pupil. I suggested that if this were so, it must come from some lack of control on his part. "But surely," my pupil objected, "it must be a mistake to break a train of thought?" I answered that my experience went to show that this was not the case, that, on the contrary, as far as I could see, it should be as easy to break off a piece of work requiring thought, and take it up again, as it is to

3. James Harvey Robinson, "The Philosopher's Stone," in *The Philosopher's Stone: Diaries of Lessons with F. Matthias Alexander*, ed. Jean M. O. Fischer (London: Mouritz, 1998), 9–10.

> carry on a train of thought, whilst taking a walk, with all its attendant interruptions, and that this should be possible not only without loss of connection, but with accruing benefit to the individual concerned.
>
> In all this I was really preparing the way to a special end—namely, that the attempt to show my pupil the analogy that existed between the point in question and his difficulty in accomplishing certain simple parts of the technique in his lessons through his disinclination to stop.…My pupil had failed to make this all-important connection between his work in re-education and his outside activities, and therefore the connection between the difficulty he experienced in "stopping" in his lessons and "stopping" in the midst of his literary work had completely escaped him.[4]

In *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, this anecdote follows the "Illustration" of "hands on back of chair" and immediately precedes Chapter V on Respiratory Mechanisms, a not insignificant fact. That Alexander took such pains to disseminate these procedures (and according to his own statements, used them himself to stay in shape) is an indication that he expected pupils would work on themselves in a similar fashion.

In his introduction to *The Use of the Self,* John Dewey describes himself being defeated by inhibitory directions:

> In bringing to bear whatever knowledge I already possessed—or thought I did—and whatever powers of discipline in mental application I had acquired in the pursuit of these studies, I had the most humiliating experience of my life, intellectually speaking. For to find that one is unable to execute directions, **including inhibitory ones**, in doing such a seemingly simple act as to sit down, when one is using all the mental capacity which one prides himself upon possessing, is not an experience congenial to one's vanity.[5]

Lessons with Alexander had an almost immediate influence on John Dewey's writings. Irene Tasker traveled from Chicago to California with Dewey and his family during the summer of 1917. Fifty years later, in London, she would remember their journey:

4. F. Matthias Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (London: Mouritz, 2004), 124–125.

5. F.M. Alexander, *The Use of the Self* (London: Orion, 2001), 10.

> I traveled from Chicago with Professor and Mrs. Dewey to the West Coast, visiting the Grand Canyon on the way. I remember Professor Dewey busy with his typewriter on the train, preparing the lectures he was due to give at Leland Stanford University. These lectures he used as material for his book *Human Nature and Conduct* which contains a valuable reference to his recent work with Alexander. We used to talk on the Observation Platform, and I remember comparing notes on "end-gaining" in lessons.[6]

1922: *HUMAN NATURE AND CONDUCT* BY JOHN DEWEY

In his book *Freedom to Change*, Frank Pierce Jones offers a succinct summary of Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*.

> *Human Nature and Conduct* was expanded from three lectures given at Stanford in June 1918. Part One is devoted to the place of habit in conduct. Habit in Dewey's exposition is interactional ("transactional" was the term he later preferred). Like breathing and other physiological functions, habits, though learned rather than innate, involve a relation between an organism and an environment.…
>
> A habit cannot be changed, however, without intelligent control of an appropriate means or mechanism.[7]

Dewey writes in *Human Nature and Conduct:*

> Recently a friend [F.M.] remarked to me that there was one superstition current among even cultivated persons. They suppose that if one is told what to do, if the right *end* is pointed out to them, all that is required in order to bring about the right act is will or wish on the part of one who is to act.…He pointed out that this belief is on a par with primitive magic in its neglect of attention to the means which are involved in reaching an end. And he went on to say that the prevalence of this belief, starting with false notions about the control of the body

6. Irene Tasker, "Connecting Links" (informal talk at the Constructive Teaching Centre, London, October 9, 1967).

7. Frank Pierce Jones, *Freedom to Change: The Development and Science of the Alexander Technique* (London: Mouritz, 1997), 100.

and extending it to control of mind and character, is the greatest bar to intelligent social progress.…

We may cite this illustration of the real nature of a physical aim or order and its execution in its contrast with the current false notion. A man who has a bad habitual posture tells himself, or is told, to stand up straight. If he is interested and responds, he braces himself, goes through certain movements, and it is assumed that the desired result is substantially attained.…Consider the assumptions which are here made. It is implied that the means or effective conditions of the realization of a purpose exist independently of established habit and even that they may be set in motion in opposition to habit. It is assumed that the means are there, so that the failure to stand erect is wholly a matter of failure of purpose and desire.…

Now in fact a man who *can* stand properly does so, and only a man who can, does. In the former case, fiats of will are unnecessary, and in the latter useless. A man who does not stand properly forms a habit of standing improperly, a positive, forceful habit. The common implication that his mistake is merely negative, that he is simply failing to do the right thing, and that the failure can be made good by an order of will is absurd.…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.

Of course something happens when a man acts upon his idea of standing straight. For a little while, he stands differently, but only a different kind of badly. He then takes the unaccustomed feeling which accompanies his unusual stand as evidence that he is now standing right. But there are many ways of standing badly, and he has simply shifted his usual way to a compensatory bad way at some opposite extreme.…Only when a man can already perform an act of standing straight does he know what it is like to have a right posture and only then can he summon the idea required for proper execution. **The act must come before the thought,** and a habit before an ability to evoke

> the thought at will.[8] Ordinary psychology reverses the actual state of affairs.[9]

In regard to this section in *Human Nature and Conduct,* Jones offers his assessment.

> Dewey uses this example of "standing straight" to illustrate his general law of habit: "Only the man whose habits are already good can know what the good is."…Thought now revolves around habit, instead of habit around thought.…Dewey is convinced that experience must come first and concepts evolve from it. But if concepts become linked to wrong, maladaptive experiences, how is change possible? Dewey found the answer in Alexandrian inhibition. We must give up the idea of gaining the end (that is standing up straight) directly, and approach it indirectly "through a flank movement."[10]

Dewey continues:

> We must stop even thinking of standing up straight. To think of it is fatal, for it commits us to the operation of an established habit of standing wrong. We must find an act within our power which is disconnected from any thought about standing. We must start to do another thing which on one side inhibits our falling into the customary bad position and on the other side is the beginning of a series of acts which may lead into the correct posture. The hard drinker who keeps thinking of not drinking is doing what he can to initiate the acts which lead to drinking. He is starting with the stimulus to the habit.
>
> …Until one takes intermediate acts seriously enough to treat them as ends, one wastes one's time in any effort at change of habits. Of the intermediate acts, the most important is the *next* one. The first or earliest means is the most important *end* to discover.

8. Dewey's words caution against using "suggestion" in teaching. See also Jones's warning in *Freedom to Change*, 201: "It is possible and really very easy to suggest a sensory experience and have a pupil or even an observer report that he experiences it, but once a person has convinced himself he has had a sensory experience, whatever this experience is, he will keep on having it whether it is appropriate or not—after this it may become almost impossible to give him an authentic experience."
9. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1957), 28–30.
10. Jones, 102.

> …We must change *what* is to be done into a *how*, the means whereby. The end thus re-appears as a series of "what nexts" and the what next of chief importance is the one nearest the present state of the one acting. Only as the end is converted into means is it definitely conceived, or intellectually defined, to say nothing of being executable.…Aladdin with his lamp could dispense with translating ends into means, but no one else can do so.[11]

Frank Pierce Jones offers a critique of Dewey's account:

> Dewey's account of the Alexander Technique is close to the account in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, though it is, of course, much more succinct. It leaves out the sensory experience that is given to the pupil by the teacher and that makes it easier for the pupil to alter his incorrect concept of the end he wishes to attain. It describes the inhibitory act as if it could be worked out by the pupil independently (as, indeed, it had been by Alexander himself). And there is no reference to the "primary control," a concept that was not developed until later. It is nevertheless a remarkable exposition of Alexander's principles, and the whole chapter can profitably be read as a philosophical introduction to the Technique.[12]

1917: IRENE TASKER

In her 1967 talk, "Connecting Links," Irene Tasker (1887–1977) offers her history inclusive of "inhibition work" and her contribution to the editing of Alexander's books.

> The actual assistance I gave F.M. was in taking over various pupils after their lessons with him, and doing "**inhibition work**" with them lying down.[13]
>
> …I began to work with Miss Webb on F.M.'s books. Our first job was the combining of the first two small books *Man's Supreme Inheritance* and *Conscious Control* into one volume. Then came the practically new *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*,

11. Dewey, 34–36.
12. Jones, 103.
13. Tasker, 14.

> as F.M. added very much more new material. On *Use of the Self* we worked from the very beginning, but this was during our later visits to New York and Boston in the early 1920s.[14]

Tasker continues with insight into Alexander's writing process.

> Here I wish to make a digression. It concerns "the books" about which we have had much adverse criticism and expression of distaste in recent years. As one who was concerned with the first three (as they now are), I can only say they were produced with "blood, sweat and tears." I can recall working with Miss Webb in the humid summer heat of Massachusetts for hours and hours a day, deciphering F.M.'s manuscript which he would send us from England—then typing it all and sending the manuscript back with our suggestions and proposed arrangement of the material. Back in New York again for the winter when F.M. returned from England we would work after the day's teaching was over. At that time we must have been working on *CCC* because I remember various people, including Professor Dewey, objecting to the length of the title *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, suggesting that the words "of the Individual" be cut out. F.M. said: "**No. That's the most important part of the title. The time is coming when the individual is going to be considered of less and less importance. The state, the community, will be all. We are concerned,**" he went on, "**with the quality of the individuals who make up the community**." Others objected to his long sentences, and I remember how he challenged Professor Dewey to shorten one of the extra-size sentences and still keep the meaning. Dewey came back and said he could not change one word.[15]

1919–1922: GERALD STANLEY LEE

Gerald Stanley Lee (1862–1944), an American clergyman and author, and his wife, Jennette, had lessons with Alexander in London for a year and half following World War I. In 1920, Lee published *The Ghost In The White House,* where he praised Alexander in no uncertain terms. In fact, the U.K. edition

14. Ibid, 15.
15. Ibid, 15.

of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (1918) was later advertised by the publisher Methuen with selected comments by Lee.[16]

> What Mr. Alexander does with people I have already hinted at in what I have said about our having a new profession in America—the profession of being a lawyer backward. Of course Mr. Alexander could not say of himself that he was in the profession of being a lawyer backward, but he does practically the same thing in his field that a lawyer backward would do. He makes it his business to change people's minds for them instead of petting their minds and he does the precise thing I have in mine except that he confines himself in doing it to what he calls psycho-mechanics—to a single first relation in which a man's mind needs to be changed—the relation of a man's mind to his body.
>
> If a man's mind gets his body right, it will not need to be changed about many other things in which it is wrong. The first thing a man's mind should be changed about usually is his body.
>
> This is the principle upon which Matthias Alexander in the very extraordinary work he is doing in London, proceeds.
>
> When you are duly accepted as a client and have duly given credentials or shown signs that you want all the truth about yourself that you can get no matter how it hurts, or how it looks, you present yourself at the appointed time in Alexander's office, or studio, or laboratory, or operating room—whatever the name may be you will feel like calling it by, before you are finished, and Alexander stands you up before the back of a chair. Then he takes you in his hands—his very powerful, sensitive and discerning hands and begins—quite literally begins reshaping you like Phidias. You begin to feel him doing you off as if you were going to be some new beautiful living statue of yourself before very long probably.
>
> Then he stands off from you a minute, takes a long deep critical gaze at you—just as Phidias would, studies the poise and the stresses of your body, x-rays down through you with a look—through you and all your inner workings from the top of your head to the soles of your feet.

16. See a facsimile of the pamphlet, courtesy of Rosslyn McLeod, in Jeroen Staring, *Frederick Matthias Alexander 1869–1955: The Origins and History of the Alexander Technique* (PhD Diss., Radboud University, 2005), 201.

Then he lays hands on you once more and works and you feel him working slowly and subtly on you once more, all the while giving orders to you softly not to help him, not to butt in soul and body on what he is doing to them with your preconceived ideas—ideas he is trying to cure you of, of what you think you think when you are thinking with what you suppose is your mind, and what you suppose you are doing with what you suppose is your body. In other words, he gives you most strenuously to understand that the one helpful thing that you can do with what you call your mind or what you call your body is to back away from them both all you can. As it is you and your ideas mostly that are what is the matter with your mind and body, and with the way you admit they are not getting on together, Alexander's first lessons with you, you find are largely occupied in getting your mind—your terrible and beautiful mind which does such queer things to you, to back away. What he really wants of you is to have you let him make a present to you outright of certain new psycho-physical experiences, which he cannot possibly get in, if you insist on slipping yours in each time instead. So he keeps working on you, you all the while trying to help in soul and body by being as much like putty—a kind of transcendental putty as you can, or as you dare, without falling apart before your own eyes. Then when you have removed all obstructions and preconceptions in your own mind—and will stop preventing him from doing it, he places your body in an entirely new position and subjects you to a physical experience in sitting, standing, and walking, you have never dreamed you could have before.

This goes on for as many sittings as are necessary and until you walk out of the studio or the operating room during the last lessons feeling like somebody else—like somebody else that has been lent to you to be—somebody else strangely and inextricably familiar that you will be allowed to wear or be or whatever it is for the rest of your life. Incidentally you are somewhat taller, your whole body is hung on you in a new way, a mile seems a few steps, stairs are like elevators, you find yourself believing ideas you believed were impossible before, liking people you thought were impossible before—even including very conveniently much of the time, yourself. He has changed your mind about your body. You are no longer fooled about what you are actually doing with your subconscious or what it is actually doing with you.

> It is not a psychic process ignoring mechanical facts in the mind, nor a purely physical process ignoring the psychic facts in the body. It is a putting of the facts in a man's mind and the facts in his body inextricably together in his consciousness—as they should be, in that he is no longer letting himself be fooled by his subconsciousness, swings free, and feels able to stop when he is being fooled about himself.
>
> I have been reading over this chapter and all I can say to my readers is, as a substitute for leaving it out, that I hope it sounds to them like a fairy story.[17]

In 1922, Lee published *Invisible Exercise: Seven Studies in Self Command with Practical Suggestions and Drills* with no mention of their source. Jones offers background on *Invisible Exercise* in *Freedom to Change*.

> When *Invisible Exercise* came out two years later, Lee had forgotten that he owed Alexander anything. He makes no mention of him, nor does he refer to the lessons in London. Instead, he tells of how he went up into the hills (the slopes of Mount Tom behind Northampton) and how the whole thing came to him like a mystical experience. By a sudden insight he realized that instead of tensing his neck against the cold he could relax it and stretch his upper back and that this would give him increased control over everything else. From this experience he worked out, he said, a system of "orders" to his neck to relax, his head to go forward and up, to lengthen and widen his back. The orders led him to invent a number of "drills"—a drill for walking, a drill for standing, a drill for lying down with two books under his head, and a drill for sitting in a chair with his hands on the back of another and pulling on it to widen his back.
>
> All of the orders and drills that Lee claimed to have invented had been used routinely by Alexander in the lessons he gave Lee in London. Lee took them and made exercises out of them by leaving out the principles of inhibition and sensory unreliability. By background and training Lee was unable to accept the unity of the organism. After dividing the self into body and mind he went on to divide the mind into conscious and subconscious. As he explained in a later book (*Rest Working*, 1926), the way to learn a new habit (like relaxing the neck)

17. Gerald Stanley Lee, "Being Helped Up the Cellar Stairs," in *The Ghost In the White House* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1920), 160–165.

> was to do it as an exercise, consciously at first until it could be "left in charge" of the subconscious. The conscious mind could then go off and "put through some new and fascinating experience," confident that the subconscious mind would take care of the order to the neck to relax.…
>
> Incensed at this travesty of his technique, Alexander threatened the publishers (ironically they were the same as his) with legal action unless they withdrew Lee's book. Without waiting for this to happen, he decided that he must prove to the public there was something more to his technique than "invisible exercises." Accordingly, he wrote out a long description of what he did with a pupil in a lesson. He chose the hands-behind-the-chair procedure (which he had been using, he said, since 1910) and went through it step by step, explaining fully what part the teacher played and what the pupil, what the "orders" meant and how they were related to the manipulation of the teacher. Where Lee had been content with half a page of description, Alexander used sixteen. Satisfied that the account was accurate and complete, he looked for a way of having it patented. Since this was not practicable, he incorporated it into his new book, where it was protected by copyright.[18]

In his 1946 diary, Walter Carrington relays:

> In the afternoon F.M. referred to the evolution of hands on the back of a chair, saying that it was put into the book (*CCC*) in response to the request of those who wanted to know how much tension should be used in the arms for any given purpose.[19]

Alexander later told Carrington that Gerald and Jennette Lee had a year of lessons in 1919 for which they never paid.[20]

On the title page of *Invisible Exercise*, Lee identifies himself as the author of *Crowds* (1913) and introduces his new book with the following enticement:

> *Being the story of one man's experience in coming through to a new kind of exercise—a setting up exercise without getting up ten minutes early—an exercise that can be taken in half a minute without interrupting one's*

18. Jones, 38–39.

19. Walter H. M. Carrington, *A Time To Remember: A Personal Diary of Teaching the F.M. Alexander Technique in 1946* (London: Sheildrake Press, 1996), 27.

20. Ibid, 30.

work, while sitting at one's desk, while standing and talking in the street, or lying back in an easy chair—taken without anybody's knowing one is taking it, and eventually without even knowing it one's self.[21]

Lee's introduction to the Four Drills includes:

The average busy man who wants to learn to hit off his own balance or line of least resistance, and have it to live with every day, would like to arrange if he could a program like this:

(1) Take a special drill in which promptly and efficiently and once for all, one coaches one's self in balancing.
(2) Pass the balancing in the drill on into balancing in everything.
(3) Drop the drill as a drill altogether.

The object of this preliminary or temporary drill should be to bring out and accentuate in a man's mind the essential spiritual and mechanical principle that underlies and makes effective any and all exercise, if only the exercise of sitting up in a chair or lying down in a bed. Any exercise a man may choose or have occasion to take, from golf and medicine ball and calisthenics to walking upstairs, should be conceived while it is being taken on the principle of hitting off a balance, of finding the line of least resistance.

The kind of drill that one does not have to keep up forever or which is of such a nature that it modulates naturally into one's daily life so that without taking any time off and without knowing it, one is practically drilling all the time, would seem to be the best.

In the pages that follow I am bringing forward a few directions for the particular form of setting-up exercise I have used in coaching myself and in hitting off my own balance. In one modified form or another its main principle may prove useful to others.

But every man, of course, must be his own coach.

The art of finding one's own control, of freeing the neck and learning to balance one's body on itself as one learns to balance it on a bicycle, is obviously an intimate and personal achievement. No one in a book like this or otherwise, can teach another man's self-control

21. Gerald Stanley Lee, *Invisible Exercise: Seven Studies in Self Command with Practical Suggestions and Drills* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1922), title page.

for him any more than he can keep his balance on his bicycle for him.

The reader will notice that the great main principle that runs through each of the following drills is the heaping up of the power of inhibition in it—the main practical means of all self-control. One has to keep saying No in it with each motion one orders from the body, to keep the body effortless and keep it along the line of least resistance. And, yet, with all its effortlessness the physical or mechanical change in the body and in the position of the organs of the body is very great.

At first until the habit of giving the fundamental orders in Invisible Exercise was established and perfected I took the exercises that follow, twenty minutes at a time—possibly an hour in all during a day—and in the rudimentary and visible form which follows, but I practice the ideas in the drills now and get my results with them now, in two minutes—practice them invisibly and without anyone's knowing it, and in any position, sitting, walking, standing or lying down, and without interrupting work. One practices any time one happens to think of it—in a street car or walking in the street, or waiting for a train, or sitting at one's desk—any time one has the impulse or the thought, one yields to it naturally and gratefully, as one would to a yawn or a smoke.

After one's first success in one's drills in conscious control, there is a stage in which one finds one's self liking to take them in short bits of time many times a day. Then a few. Finally, one begins taking them as a position, a balance of tension. They become subconscious and one is taking them without knowing it, all the while, even in one's sleep.[22]

Within the Drills, Lee offers "Sitting Orders":

Take a medium-height chair and sit on it as if it were a pivot. The most favoring thing to do usually is to sit on the edge of the chair. In any case see to it that neither the bottom of the chair nor the back gives you any guiding support. Sit in such a way that you have nothing but the balance you are giving your body yourself, to make you comfortable or to keep you from falling.

22. Lee, 171–174.

Take another chair, one that has a horizontal piece across the middle of the back which can be taken hold of from above by the hands.

Place this chair two feet in front of the other one.

Then sit quite still, delay a little and give yourself some reminding before you go on, remind yourself just where you are, precisely what you are there for, and precisely what you are going to do, and how you are going to do it. In other words recall yourself to yourself—see to it (as the suggestive old expression goes) that instead of being beside yourself, you make a collection of yourself—before you proceed to go on. There is rather more of this collecting necessary and desirable and even agreeable—when one once learns how to do it—than a man would quite suppose at first.

What I used to put myself through at first, before I let myself begin my orders to my back was something like this. I give it merely as a sample. Usually a man comes to know himself best and can make up privately for his own use, some order of self-collecting and self-reminding, worded to suit his own case, but here is what might be called the spirit of what it would be like, in mine:

I sit on this chair.

I balance my body.

I even balance my mind.

I decide once for all—no matter how long it takes—I am not going to be prevented in what I am about to do, by my mind—by any little unconscious habit my mind may have toward my body—which it is going to try of course, if it can, to put over on me now—slide in, in front of the new habit I prefer.

No fear.

No hurry.

No effort.

No mooning.

No tumpty-tumming.

No mere rescuing or recovering.

Then I give the orders in the larger type lock stitch fashion, on unfolding out of the other progressively.

I RELAX MY NECK (I make my mind stop cramping my neck.)

I LET MY HEAD GO UP AND FORWARD* (That is to say, having got my neck unlocked and out of the way, my head which belongs further up and wants to go further up, is allowed to go). I do not make my head go up. I let it. I stop preventing it.

(*invisibly forward—poised a shade of a line further vertical.)

I LET MY BACK WIDEN AND LENGTHEN. (I free the spring in it that makes it want to stretch its natural length and its full strength. A back naturally prefers doing what it has to do, as a long lever rather than a short one. The second it is allowed to, it relieves itself. I do not make it lengthen. I let it. I stop preventing it.)

As you sit in your chair, lean forward when you have given these three orders. Lean forward as slightly as you can—invisibly. Then repeat the orders four times like this:

I RELAX MY NECK IN ORDER TO LET MY HEAD GO UP AND FORWARD IN ORDER TO LET MY BACK WIDEN AND LENGTHEN IN ORDER TO LEAN FORWARD A QUARTER OF AN INCH. As you repeat this order each time poise forward the whole body a quarter of an inch. After giving this order the first time, give it three times with your body a quarter of an inch further forward each time until at the end of the four orders you are poised forward an inch.

Then give the four orders a second time—taking up a quarter of an inch each time until you are poised forward two inches.

Then three inches.

Then four.

In your new position of leaning forward about four inches in your chair (your arms relaxed and your hands in your lap) lift your arms up and out as you would in yawning and stretching until they are above the top of the chair ahead.

Still giving orders to relax the neck and to let the head go forward and up, and the back widen and lengthen, swing the hands down and let them alight on the top of the horizontal cross-piece in the middle of the back of the chair ahead. Take hold of the cross-piece lightly with fingers in front and the thumbs behind. See that your elbows are free and that your hands are precisely parallel, and holding on

to the chair with your fingers just hard enough to keep the fingers from slipping, and still ordering your neck to relax and your head to go forward and up and your back to widen and lengthen, pull your hands apart and widen your back yourself. By pulling your hands apart you soon feel your back widening behind you, while you pull.

Repeat this poising forward quarter of an inch and pulling four times. Before the motion each time give the order "Quarter forward" and after you have relaxed your neck and made it, give yourself a receipt for it saying "First Quarter." Repeat in the same way.

Quarter forward…Second Quarter

Quarter forward…Third Quarter

Quarter forward…Fourth Quarter.

Pull with incredible slightness—that is with a slightness you would not believe you are capable of—until you learn. This exercise in widening the back is an exercise in learning an ease. It is in learning the new ease that the new strength comes of itself. Do not indulge in the weakness which your mind will probably try to trick you into, if it can, the weakness of trying to be strong; keep giving the order to this end all the while, over and over to yourself. I RELAX MY NECK IN ORDER TO LET MY HEAD GO UP AND FORWARD (LET IT, NOT MAKE IT) and IN ORDER TO LET MY BACK WIDEN AND LENGTHEN.

After pulling your hands apart, as you lean forward to the chair in front, widening your back four times, spread your knees to rise. Then relax your neck to let your head go forward and up and widen and lengthen your back, and with your hips moving slowly forward and your knees slowly backward, rise and stand on your feet.

You have finished the sitting-down exercise. One of the best tests by which you can know you are right in it, is that in any position you are in, you are in neutral, you feel yourself in balance, forward and backward, up and down and can reverse in a flash at any time.[23]

We should be grateful to Lee. Without him we would probably not have had the "Illustration" in *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* with Alexander's blow-by-blow commentary. This is the last time we find practical advice in Alexander's writings.

23. Lee, 190–194.

CHAPTER V

1923

1923: *CONSTRUCTIVE CONSCIOUS CONTROL OF THE INDIVIDUAL*: "ILLUSTRATION"

Alexander's 1923 publication of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* was divided into four parts. In Part Two, "Sensory Appreciation in its Relation to Learning and Learning to Do," the chapter "Imperfect Sensory Appreciation" covers inhibition and sensory unreliability before proceeding with the "Illustration" chapter: a detailed, step-by-step means whereby of hands on chair, seated. In a footnote, Alexander states that he had been using the exercise since 1910. The student is seated, with movement from the hips, lengthening and widening back, and appropriate use of upper limbs as manipulated by the teacher. Compare hand position with that of the chair exercise of 1910.[1]

The "Illustration" chapter opens with Alexander stating that the phrases which follow are inadequate,

> but with a teacher present to demonstrate in person what he means by them, they serve their purpose.[2]

> **1. Shortening the Spine**
>
> An objector might justly say that this is practically impossible, but we are dealing with the *use* of the spine, and one of the most common defects amongst human beings today is an undue curving of the spine in the use of the self in the acts of everyday life, and naturally this causes a shortening in stature. As a practical demonstration, take a piece of paper, and after placing it flat on another sheet, draw a line

1. See the chair exercise in "Supplement to Re-education of the Kinaesthetic Systems Concerned with the Development of Robust Well-Being," pages 55–56 in Chapter III of this book.
2. F. Matthias Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (London: Mouritz, 2004), 112.

along the extreme ends of the top piece, thereby recording the length by the pencil marks on the paper underneath. Now lift the top piece and curve it slightly and replace it with one end touching one line, and without interfering with the curve. It will be seen that the other end of the paper does not reach the other line.

2. Lengthening the Spine

The foregoing will serve to show that if we modify the curve in the spine, we tend to lengthen it. For instance, to go back to our illustration, if we take the curve out of the top piece of paper, and replace it as in the first instance, it will reach both lines, showing that during this experiment a lengthening process has been operative.[3]

3. Relax the Neck

There is considerable confusion on the part of the pupil when he attempts to obey directions to relax some part of the organism. In ordinary teaching, pupils and teachers are quite convinced that if some part of the mechanism is too tense, they can relax it—that is, *do the relaxing by direct means.* This is a delusion on their part, but it is difficult to convince them of it. In the first place, if they do chance to get rid of the specific tension it will be by a partial collapse of the parts concerned, or of other parts, possibly even by a general collapse of the whole organism. In the second place, it is obvious that if some part of the organism is unduly tensed, it is because the pupil is attempting to do with it the work of some other part or parts, often work for which it is quite unsuited.[4]

Note that as early as 1910, Alexander offered this observation about "a man who habitually stiffens his neck in walking, sitting or other ordinary acts of life. This is a sign that he is endeavoring to do with the muscles of his neck the work which should be performed by certain other muscles of his body, notably those of his back."[5]

3. See the photos of correct and incorrect standing position on page 60 in Chapter III of this book. If the page is turned so the back in the photograph is horizontal, it will be seen that "correct" represents a lengthening.

4. Alexander, 112–113.

5. F. Matthias Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance: Conscious Guidance and Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* (London: Mouritz, 1996), 59.

In 1946, Walter Carrington would write in his personal diary:

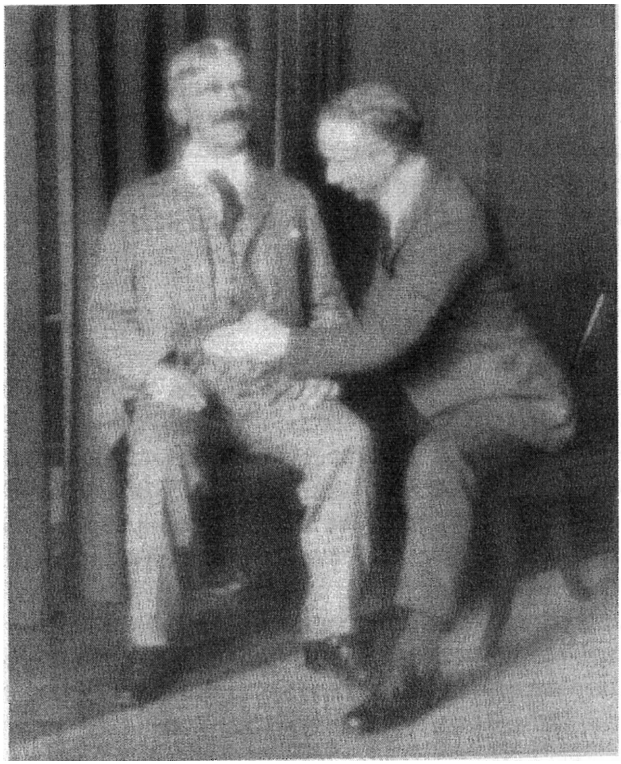
> At tea F.M. said that he had, at last, decided that we must cut out in future teaching all instructions to order the neck to relax or to be free because such orders only lead to other forms of doing. If a person is stiffening the neck, the remedy is to get them to stop projecting the messages that are bringing about this condition and not to project messages to counteract the effects of the other messages. He said that the implied contradiction had worried him for a long time but, after working on Hallis this morning, he saw that it must be changed so all orders in future will be framed so as to emphasise "non-doing."[6]

Alexander continues with his list of phrases in the 1923 "Illustration" chapter:

> **4. Head Forward and Up**
>
> This is one of the most inadequate and often confusing phrases used as a means of conveying our ideas in words, and it is a dangerous instruction to give to any pupil, unless the teacher first demonstrates his meaning by giving to the pupil, *by means of manipulation,* the exact experiences involved.
>
> **5. Widen the Back**
>
> This instruction rivals the last one in its shortcomings, when considered as a phrase for the conveyance of an idea which we expect a pupil to construe correctly, unless it is given by a teacher who is capable of demonstrating what he means by readjusting the pupil's organism so that the conditions desired may be brought about.
>
> What really occurs is that there is brought about a very marked change in the position of the bony structures of the thorax—particularly noticeable if a posterior view is taken—also a permanent enlargement of the thoracic cavity, with a striking increase in thoracic mobility and the minimum tension of the whole of the mechanisms involved.[7]

6. Walter H. M. Carrington, *A Time to Remember: A Personal Diary of Teaching the F.M. Alexander Technique in 1946* (London: Sheildrake Press, 1996), 59.

7. Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, 113.



Another photo taken by Irene Tasker of Alexander working with John Dewey from 1916/1917. Here Alexander works with Dewey from a seated position. Note Dewey's outward gaze. Is Alexander "widening the back" from the floating ribs?

Here is how Alexander explained widening the back in 1910:

> A little consideration will show that any alteration in the spine must necessarily affect the position and working of the ribs. (The analogy of the keel of a boat and the ribs which spring from it may well be held in mind to make clear the following explanation.) It will be seen that as the ribs are held apart by muscular tissues (analogous to the boards of a boat), a bending of the spine will not buckle the ribs unless great force is applied, force sufficient to rupture the muscular tissue. But it is equally evident that there must be some play in the ribs in order that they may adjust themselves to the new position.
>
> This play is effected in the human body (and would be effected mechanically in the ribs of a boat, if they possessed sufficient elasticity) by the coming together of the ends of the "false" and "flying" ribs—that it, those lower ribs which are not attached to the bony sternum. This flattening of the curve of the ribs and the approach of their free ends towards each other reduce the thoracic cavity, just as in our illustration of the boat its capacity would be reduced if we forcibly narrowed the distance between the thwarts. On the other hand, we see that by increasing the thoracic capacity, and so increasing the distance between the ends of these ribs, we are applying a mechanical principle which by a reverse action tends to straighten the spine.[8]

In the 1911 *Man's Supreme Inheritance Addenda*, Alexander also dealt with lengthening the spine (#2, page 95) and widening the back (#5, page 96):

> The important factors in relation to spinal curvature are these:
>
> (a) the bent or curved and therefore shortened spine;
>
> (b) the decreased internal capacity of the thoracic cavity.
>
> Plainly, attention must first be given to straightening and lengthening the curved and shortened spine. This can be done by **an expert manipulator who is able to diagnose the erroneous preconceived ideas of the person concerned, and cause** the pupil to **inhibit them while employing the position of mechanical advantage.**[9] And it

8. Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, 185.

9. Alexander introduced positions of mechanical advantage earlier than this 1911 *Addenda:* in 1908, with the book exercise (see page 43 in Chapter II of this book), and in 1910, with the door and chair exercises (see pages 55–57 in Chapter III of this book).

can be done without asking the pupil to perform what he understands as a single physical act. [Non-doing; inhibition.] Moreover, if the correct guiding orders are given to the pupil by the teacher, and the pupil makes no attempt to hold him or herself in the lengthened position, such use of the muscular mechanism will, nevertheless, be brought about as will ensure that the torso is held in a correct position. Formerly the consciousness in regard to the correct action has been erroneous, a mere delusion, and the muscular mechanisms have worked **to pull the body down**. The truth of the matter is that in the old morbid conditions which have brought about the curvature, the muscles intended by Nature for the correct working of the parts concerned had been put out of action, and the whole purpose of the re-educatory method I advocate is to bring back these muscles into play, not by physical exercises, but by the employment of **a position of mechanical advantage** and the repetition of the correct **inhibiting and guiding mental orders** by the pupil, and the **correct manipulation and direction by the teacher, until the two psycho-physical factors become an established psycho-physical habit.**

These two actions—the re-education of the "Kinaesthetic Systems" and the increasing of the thoracic capacity which applies a mechanical power by means of the muscles and ribs to the straightening of the spine—**are both aspects of the one central** idea, and are not separate and divisible acts.[10]

Alexander's list of phrases in the 1923 "Illustration" chapter continues:

6. Support the Body with the Arms

This instruction is given to the pupil when he is holding the back of a chair, whilst sitting or standing, in order to give the teacher the opportunity to secure more quickly and easily for the pupil certain experiences essential at a particular stage of his work in co-ordination. The varying details of the *means whereby* the use indicated of the arms and body is to be gained could not be set down in writing to meet the requirements of each pupil, for they vary with each slight stage of progress. It is for this reason that "correct positions" or "postures" find no place in the practical teaching technique employed in the work of

10. Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, 184–186.

re-education advocated in this book. **A correct position or posture indicates a fixed position, and a person held to a fixed position cannot grow, as we understand growth.** [As John Dewey said: Growth—growing is the only moral end.] The correct position today cannot be the correct position a week later for any person who is advancing in the work of re-education and co-ordination.

7. Widen the Arms whilst Supporting and Raising the Body

This is the most deceptive of the list of instructions set down in these pages. In the first place, if carried out without manipulative assistance, it is a contradictory instruction, seeing that if you widen the arms, as the act is generally understood, the body would be lowered, not raised. The tendency of the pupil in this movement is to contract unduly the inner muscles of the upper part of the arms, a procedure which interferes with the work the teacher has in view. This must be prevented, and a skilful teacher can employ the above instructions successfully to this end.

We will now pass on to our illustration.

THE PUPIL IS ASKED TO SIT IN A CHAIR IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUE SPECIALLY SET DOWN FOR THE ACT OF SITTING AND STANDING IN *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. When he is seated, his body being supported by the back of the chair on which he is sitting, another chair is placed before him with its back towards him.

THE PUPIL IS THEN ASKED TO GIVE THE FOLLOWING PREVENTIVE ORDERS.

In the way of correct direction and guidance, HE IS ASKED TO ORDER THE NECK TO RELAX, TO ORDER THE HEAD FORWARD AND UP TO LENGTHEN THE SPINE.

> It must here be clearly understood that in previous manipulative and other work done in connection with the technique, the pupil will have been made familiar in theory and practice with Order 1. He is able to give certain orders correctly and also to put them into effect. In the present instance, it is explained to him that the order given is to be merely *preventive*—a projected wish *without any attempt on the pupil's part to carry it out successfully.*

THE TEACHER REPEATS THE ORDERS AND WITH HIS HANDS HE PROCEEDS TO BRING THE PUPIL'S BODY GENTLY FORWARD FROM THE HIPS.

It is important to note here that the imperfectly coordinated person tends to *shorten* the stature and *pull the head back* in making this movement forward. Unless, therefore, the pupil remembers this subconscious tendency to shorten, and attends to the new directive orders which will counteract this subconscious tendency, his old habit will prove too strong for him, and at the first touch from the teacher to bring his body forward, though this touch may be so light that it would not move an inch-thick pine-board of the same length and width as the torso of the pupil, the latter will start to move forward at a ratio of say, seventy-five per cent subconscious response to his old habit, and only twenty-five per cent conscious response to the new directive and guiding orders. This latter estimate is, in most cases, too liberal a one, for, as a rule, the slightest touch releases the old sensory activities associated subconsciously in the pupil's conception with the act of "moving forward," this being an "end" which the pupil, in spite of all warnings to the contrary, has already decided upon, and he becomes so dominated by the idea of "moving forward" (his "end"), that the new conscious directive orders are no longer projected. Instead, the old subconscious directive orders associated with his bad habits and with his unreliable sensory appreciation hold sway, and so, in the place of ordering his neck to relax, his head forward and up, in order to secure the necessary lengthening, he will actually throw his head back, stiffen his neck, and tend to shorten his spine by unduly curving it, in accordance with his old fixed habit in moving forward. These particular faults are accompanied, more or less, by an undue and incorrect tension of the legs and other parts of the organism, and also by a stiffening at the hip joints, the defective use of the parts culminating in an expenditure of energy out of all proportion to the requirements of the evolution.

When this happens, the teacher must point out to the pupil that he has not quite comprehended what is required of him, and he must again place the whole position before the pupil, and from as many angles as possible, until he is certain that the pupil understands that the primary orders which he is asked to give are *preventive* orders, and that if he gives these preventive orders (inhibition of the old misdirected activities), and then proceeds to give the new ones, *his spine will be kept at its greatest possible length* (not shortened), whilst the body will be moved forward from the hips easily and satisfactorily, without interfering with the generally relative position of the torso (except in the matter of angle), just as a door moves on its hinges.

THE TEACHER WILL THEN RENEW THE REQUEST TO THE PUPIL TO GIVE THE ORDERS, AND WITH HIS HANDS WILL COMMAND FOR HIM THE ACTUAL PERFORMANCE OF THE MOVEMENT, of which these orders are the counterpart. Sometimes it may be suggested that the pupil shall himself request the teacher to move his body forward for him whilst he (the pupil) gives his orders or directions.

When the teacher is satisfied that the pupil is giving due attention to the directive orders up to this point, and has gained a due appreciation of their relative value as primary, secondary, and following factors; when, also, the correct sensory experiences, made possible by the teacher's help in the way of readjustment and re-education, have been sufficiently repeated, the pupil can be taken a step further in the evolution.

> At every step in the work it is essential that the pupil should rehearse his orders from the beginning, because these earlier orders constitute the *means whereby* a further step may be successfully taken. In giving himself orders, the pupil must on every occasion begin with the primary orders before going on to the secondary orders, and so on.[11]

This part of the 1923 "Illustration"—moving, back and forward, head leading, hips following, back lengthening and widening—was a movement used extensively by Alexander in his later years. Peggy Williams (1916–2004) said

11. Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, 114–117.

her lessons with Alexander consisted mainly of him moving her in this way.[12] Before progressing to hands on the chair, the pupil needs to be familiar with this movement which requires patience and persistence from both teacher and pupil.

Alexander continues with his instructions:

> THE PUPIL MUST NOW AGAIN ORDER THE NECK TO RELAX, THE HEAD FORWARD AND UP, WHILST THE TEACHER WITH HIS HANDS SECURES THAT POSITION OF THE TORSO IN WHICH THE BACK MAY BE SAID TO BE WIDENED. These orders should be repeated several times and be *continued* WHILST THE TEACHER TAKES THE PUPIL'S RIGHT ARM WITH HIS HANDS, AND MOVES IT FORWARD UNTIL THE PUPIL'S HAND IS ABOVE THE TOP RAIL OF THE BACK OF THE CHAIR. THE PUPIL SHOULD THEN BE REQUESTED TO REPEAT THE ORDERS SET DOWN AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS PARAGRAPH [inhibition = non-doing], AND THEN TO TAKE THE WEIGHT OF THE ARM ENTIRELY [or ask the pupil to leave the hand exactly where it is—this too is non-doing but directing] AS THE TEACHER DISENGAGES HIS HANDS FROM THE SUPPORTED ARM.
>
> Great care must be taken to see that the pupil has not interfered with the mechanism of the torso in the effort to take the weight of the arm. This interference can take place in various ways, but it always implies that the pupil has forgotten his orders and has harked back to one or other of his subconscious habits. What is essential here is a coordinated use of the arms, and the only way by which he can secure this is, first, by giving the necessary preventive orders, and then by rehearsing the series of new orders given by the teacher, in which the movement of the arms is *linked up* with the use of the other parts of the body.
>
> If the pupil has not interfered with the mechanism of the torso in the effort to take the weight of the arm, HE SHOULD NEXT BE REQUESTED TO GRASP THE TOP RAIL OF THE BACK OF THE CHAIR GENTLY AND FIRMLY, KEEPING THE FINGERS AS *straight* AS POSSIBLE AND QUITE FLAT AGAINST THE WOOD

12. See pages 147–149 in Chapter VII of this book.

OF THE FRONT PORTION OF THE TOP RAIL OF THE CHAIR, THE THUMB ALSO TO BE KEPT AS STRAIGHT AS POSSIBLE, BEING CALLED UPON TO DO DUTY ON THE BACK PORTION OF THE TOP RAIL OF THE CHAIR, WITH THE WRIST CURVED SLIGHTLY INWARDS TOWARDS THE LEFT. The teacher will, of course, as far as possible assist the pupil with these hand movements.

> If, however, as is too often the case, the pupil fails to continue to give his orders, and so interferes with the mechanisms of the torso during the movement of the arm towards the chair, *the pupil must be requested to begin once more at the very first step in the evolution, and this must be continued until a satisfactory result has been secured.* This principle must be applied in every instance in this work of re-education and readjustment. It should be realized here that, during the course of this work, a process of building is going on, fundamental sensory building, on a general and not a specific basis. It will perhaps make this clearer if we use the analogy of building with bricks, for the processes concerned with this fundamental sensory building calls for the use of directive orders [thinking] just as the process of ordinary building calls for the use of bricks.

THE PUPIL MUST THEN BE ASKED AGAIN TO ORDER THE NECK TO RELAX, THE HEAD FORWARD AND UP, AND THE TEACHER WILL REPEAT HIS PREVIOUS EFFORT TO ESTABLISH THAT CONDITION OF THE TORSO AND BACK ESSENTIAL TO SATISFACTORY ARM WORK, WHILST HE REPEATS WITH THE PUPIL'S LEFT ARM THE EVOLUTION JUST PERFORMED WITH THE RIGHT, SO THAT THE PUPIL WILL BE GRASPING THE BACK OF THE CHAIR WITH THE LEFT HAND IN THE SAME WAY AS HE HAS BEEN HOLDING IT WITH THE RIGHT, the teacher giving such assistance in this movement as he deems necessary in the light of his experience.

> It will be found that at this, as at every other step in the work, one pupil will need more assistance than another. One pupil will need help in one part of the movement, the next will need it at another part, and so on. It may even, in some cases, be necessary for the teacher to give a pupil as much assistance

in bringing forward the left arm as he gave him in bringing forward the right arm. In all these matters the decision must be left to the discretion of the teacher. *To command success, correct experiences in sensory appreciation must follow the giving of correct directive and guiding orders. By the repetition of this process the pupil reaches a stage where he can depend on himself with confidence.*

At this point THE PUPIL SHOULD BE ASKED TO RECONSIDER THE DIFFERENT MEANS WHEREBY HE HAS BEEN ENABLED TO REACH THIS STAGE OF HIS WORK, AND TO REPEAT ORALLY THE DIRECTIONS AND GUIDING ORDERS EXACTLY IN THE SEQUENCE IN WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO HIM BY HIS TEACHER, AS PRIMARY, SECONDARY, AND FOLLOWING FACTORS. In this way the teacher will be able to test the pupil's accuracy or otherwise in this connection. *Whilst the pupil repeats the orders, he must remain in the coordinated condition which has been secured during the performance of the evolution.*

When the teacher is satisfied that his pupil has succeeded up to this point, he may go on to give him the additional guiding orders, and proceed to help him to put them into practical effect during the completion of the evolution.

The following are the new directive orders.

The pupil is asked:

(1) TO CONTINUE TO HOLD THE TOP OF THE CHAIR BY KEEPING THE FINGERS QUITE STRAIGHT FROM THE FIRST JOINTS OF THE FINGERS TO THEIR TIPS, WITH THE THUMBS AND FINGERS KEPT FLAT AGAINST THE TOP RAIL OF THE CHAIR AS PREVIOUSLY INDICATED.

(2) TO ALLOW THE WRIST OF THE LEFT ARM TO BE CURVED INWARDS TOWARDS THE RIGHT, AND THE WRIST OF THE RIGHT ARM TO BE CURVED INWARDS TOWARDS THE LEFT.

(3) TO ALLOW THE ELBOW OF THE LEFT ARM TO BE CURVED OUTWARDS TOWARDS THE LEFT, AND THE ELBOW OF THE RIGHT ARM TO BE CURVED OUTWARDS TOWARDS THE RIGHT.

In order that the pupil may hold the rail of the chair, keeping the fingers and wrists in the position indicated above, HE SHOULD REHEARSE ALL THE DIRECTIVE ORDERS PREVIOUSLY GIVEN TO HIM AND WHICH HE HAS ALREADY ORALLY REPEATED TO HIS TEACHER.

The teacher's aim is now to give the pupil the experiences necessary to a gentle, forearm pull from the fingers, and to this end HE WILL TAKE HOLD OF THE PUPIL'S ELBOWS AND DIRECT THEM OUTWARDS AND SLIGHTLY DOWNWARDS, and, following this, will give the sensory experiences required in DIRECTING THE UPPER PARTS OF THE ARMS (ABOVE THE ELBOW) AWAY FROM ONE ANOTHER (THE RIGHT ARM TOWARDS THE RIGHT AND THE LEFT ARM TOWARDS THE LEFT), IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE PUPIL WILL BE SUPPORTING THE TORSO WITH HIS ARMS.

THE PUPIL WILL NOW BE ASKED TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE TORSO IN THIS WAY, CONTINUING TO REHEARSE HIS ORDERS, whilst the teacher so adjusts the torso that the large "lifting" muscles of the back will be employed coordinately with the other parts of the organism in bringing about such use of the respiratory mechanism that they will function to the maximum at the particular stage of development reached from day to day. Success in this part of the evolution will bring about a change in the condition of the back, which would be described by the ordinary observer as a "widening of the back."

These orders are the *means whereby* such use of the mechanisms may be brought about, associated with a satisfactory readjustment of the back, as will cause the floating ribs to move freely, and also tend to develop the maximum intra-thoracic capacity and to establish the most effective use of the respiratory mechanism during the sleeping as well as the waking hours.

> In my opinion, it is expedient to set down some of the impeding conditions which, in my teaching experience, will be found present, more or less, in the case of every pupil during the attempt at coordination at this stage of the movement. The muscular tension, for instance, employed in the use of the fingers and arms is almost always a harmful and unnecessary

one. Very frequently this undue tension of the arm muscles will actually prevent the pupil from using his fingers to anything like the best advantage in holding the chair. I have even known instances in which the fingers would actually be kept away from the wood without the pupil's knowing it. This undue tension is particularly noticeable in the case of the contractor muscles of the arm in the region of the biceps and in that of the pectoral muscles in the front of the chest, whereas in a satisfactory state of sensory appreciation these muscles would remain more or less relaxed during the movement, and the greater part of the work would fall on the muscles of the opposite side of the arm and the back (chiefly on the latissimus dorsi). These would thus be the chief factors in the act, factors which make both for the maximum activity of the respiratory processes, with the minimum of effort, and also for an increased intra-thoracic capacity accompanied by a broadening of the costal arch (increased vital capacity).

Other impeding conditions are apt to occur at the pupil's first attempt to pull gently with the arms. In his attempt to do this, either one or other or all the fingers will become bent and the wrists will be curved outwards, *exactly the reverse of the action indicated by the orders* or of the one desired. *This failure to carry out the given orders is due chiefly to the fact that the pupil's sensory appreciation in the matter of due and proper muscular tension is sadly inadequate.*

This leads us directly to a consideration of the means we have adopted whereby a new and reliable sensory appreciation can be developed in the pupil, the *means whereby* he will be enabled to perform this evolution with the *minimum of muscular tension*. In this connection the reader's attention is specially directed to the following:

If the pupil will carry out the act of the forearm pull and attend to the widening of the upper parts of the arms, whilst continuing to recognize as factors of primary importance the keeping of the fingers straight and the wrists curved inwards, *the minimum tension will be exerted*. Immediately the pupil interferes with the position of the fingers or wrists (in the latter case, tending to curve them outwards

instead of inward), this will indicate that *the point of minimum muscular tension has been passed.*

> It should be remembered here that the pupil's position in this act is an ideal one for watching the hands and wrists. Therefore, if the pupil will watch carefully any tendency to the incorrect movements described above, these can be checked as soon as they show themselves. But here again we have one of the numerous instances where a person will refrain from doing the thing he knows he can do (in this instance, to watch the hands— "means-whereby"), and will prefer to depend instead on the old haphazard method of "trying to do it right" guided by his feeling, and this despite the fact that in every experience in which he has taken "feeling" for a guide he has found it to be unreliable and even delusive.[13]

"RESPIRATORY MECHANISMS"

Alexander follows the 1923 "Illustration" chapter with "Respiratory Mechanisms," a description of classic simplicity and clarity. It should be noticed, as in the 1910 exercises, that the account of a position of mechanical advantage is followed by an extensive description of the respiratory mechanisms, whose activity will have been previously stimulated.

> Breathing is that psycho-physical act by means of which air is taken into and expelled from the lungs. These are an extremely interesting part of our anatomy, consisting of two bags containing a network of cells capable of contraction and expansion, with air passages and blood vessels so associated and constituted that the oxygen contained in the air, when taken into the lungs, can be absorbed through the tissue of the blood-vessels and cells and air passages, whilst carbon dioxide passes through this tissue from the blood vessels into the lung cells to be expelled from the lungs. The thorax (chest) has a bony structure, made up of the vertebrae of the spine, the different ribs, and the sternum (breast-bone), those ribs which are attached to the sternum as well as to the spine being much less mobile than those which are not

13. Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, 117–122.

attached to the sternum, the most mobile being known as "floating ribs." The lungs are enclosed within the cavity of this bony thorax of which the diaphragm is the floor, and the only entrance to which is through the trachea (windpipe).

From the very first breath there is a more or less constant air pressure (atmospheric pressure) within the lungs, but not any air pressure on the outside of the lungs. Air pressure is sufficient to overcome the elasticity of the tissue of the air-cells, and to increase their size, when not held in check by the pressure of the walls of the thorax upon the lung-bag itself. The lungs are subject, however, to this pressure exerted by the walls of the thorax during the contraction, and to the release of this pressure during the expansion of the thoracic cavity. The pressure that can be exerted by the walls of the thorax on the outside of the lung-bag is much greater than that which results from the atmospheric pressure (air pressure) within the lungs. Therefore, when we wish, as we say to "take a breath" (inspiration), all we have to do is to reduce the pressure exerted upon the lungs by the chest walls, and to employ those muscular co-ordinations which increase the intra-thoracic capacity of the lungs (increased chest capacity), thereby causing a partial vacuum in the lung cells of which atmospheric pressure takes advantage, by increasing the size of the cells and thus the amount of air in the lungs. It then follows that if we wish to exhale breath (expiration), we merely have to increase the pressure on the lungs by contracting the walls of the thorax, thereby overcoming the atmospheric pressure exerted within the lungs, and thus forcing the air out of them. It must be remembered that in all these contractions and expansions, the floor of the cavity (diaphragm) plays its part, moving upwards or downwards in sympathy with the particular adjustment of the bony thorax.

Consideration of the foregoing will serve to convince the reader that if anyone desires, either by his own effort or with the help of a teacher, to secure the maximum control and development in breathing, all he has to do is to be able to command the maximum functioning of the psycho-physical mechanisms concerned with the satisfactory **expansion and contraction of the walls of the thoracic**, **chest cavity** [thoracic mobility]. *It is not necessary for him even to*

think of taking a breath; as a matter of fact, it is more or less harmful to do so, when such psycho-physical conditions are present as call for re-education on a general basis.

The crux of the whole matter, then, is how to gain this control in expanding and contracting the chest, as we say, and thus permanently to increase its capacity and mobility. The answer to this question calls for a comprehensive consideration of the primary, secondary, and other psycho-physical factors involved.

Naturally, the most potent stimulus to the use of the respiratory mechanisms is the necessity for an adequate supply of oxygen, and for the elimination of carbon dioxide from the blood. But we must not overlook the fact that in any attempt to gain for a pupil the desired control and the increased thoracic capacity, the pupil's incorrect use of the mechanisms involved is an impeding factor, and so, in attempts to correct such imperfect use, the first consideration must be to *prevent the psycho-physical activities which are responsible for this defective use* by the development and employment of the pupil's ability to inhibit. This demands from the teacher a correct diagnosis of the pupil's numerous bad habits in connection with the act of respiration in everyday life, and a comprehensive understanding of the imperfections in sensory appreciation, conception, adjustment, and co-ordination which are manifested in these bad habits.

As a result of the diagnosis, the teacher will go on to explain to the pupil why certain readjustments and improved co-ordinations are necessary in his case, and will then give him a reasoned consideration of the *means whereby* these readjustments and improved co-ordinations may be secured. To this end the teacher will first name the preventive guiding orders or directions which the pupil is to give to himself in the way of *inhibiting* the deceptive guiding sensations concerned with the defective use of the mechanisms responsible for what we call bad habits in breathing. The teacher must make certain that the pupil remembers these guiding orders or directions *in the sequence in which they are to be employed.* When this has been done, the pupil may begin the practice in connection with the work of prevention. This means a series of repeated experiences on the part of the pupil in refusing to try for the "end," and in positively pausing to

think of the original faults pointed out by the teacher, and refusing to repeat them.

For instance, suppose that a pupil has a special desire to increase his chest capacity. This desire acts as a stimulus to the psycho-physical processes involved and sets in motion all the unreliable guiding and directing sensations associated with his established idea of chest expansion. The only way, then, by which he can *prevent* the old subconscious habits from gaining the upper hand is for him to *refuse to act* upon this idea. This means that as soon as the idea or desire comes to him *he definitely stops* and says to himself: "No. I won't do what I should like to do to increase my chest capacity, because, if I do what I feel will increase it, I shall only use my mechanisms as I have used them before, and what is the good of that? I know I have been using them incorrectly up to now, else why do I need these lessons?" In other words, he inhibits his desire to act.

The teacher, of course, must decide when the pupil can proceed from the preventive to the next stage of his work. He must then proceed to name for the pupil the new orders in connection with the satisfactory guiding sensations concerned with the correct use of the mechanisms involved. The pupil should recall and give himself these new guiding orders, whilst the teacher, by means of his manipulation, assists him to secure the correct readjustment and co-ordination (the desired "end"), thus ensuring a series of satisfactory experiences which should be repeated until the bad habits are eradicated and the new and correct experiences replace them and become established.

Repetition of these correct experiences is all that is required to establish a satisfactory use of the coordinated psycho-physical mechanisms concerned, when an increase or decrease in the intra-thoracic (chest) capacity can be secured at will, with the minimum of effort and with a mathematical precision. The increase in the intra-thoracic (chest) capacity indicated decreases the pressure on the outside of the lung-bag and causes a momentary partial vacuum in the lungs. This vacuum is promptly filled with air, in consequence of the atmospheric pressure exerted upon the inside of the lung-cells, and this process increases the amount of air in the lungs, constituting the act

of what we call "taking a breath" (inspiration). The marvelous efficiency of the respiratory machine, when properly employed, becomes apparent when we realize that we have only to continue to employ the same *means whereby* we secure the increase (expansion) to secure the decrease (contraction) of the intra-thoracic capacity, which means that in process the contracting chest walls exert such increased pressure on the lungs that the air-pressure within is overcome, and the air consequently expelled, this process constituting "expiration"; the expiration and previous inspiration being the completed act of breathing. When a satisfactory, coordinated use of the mechanisms concerned with the acts of inspiration and expiration is established, the teacher may then proceed to help the pupil to employ this coordinated use in connection with all vocal effort. As has been pointed out in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, this should begin with *whispered* vocalization, preferably the vowel sound "**Ah**" as this form of vocal use, being so little employed in everyday life, is rarely associated with ordinary bad psycho-physical habits in vocalization.

For this reason, the teacher will begin by helping the pupil to make the expiration on a **whispered** "**Ah**." This calls for a knowledge of the psycho-physical "means-whereby" of the use of the organism *in general,* and of the acts of opening the mouth, using the lips, tongue, soft palate, etc., with freedom from stress and strain of the vocal mechanisms, and to this end a definite technique is employed. The process involved prevents sniffing and "sucking in air," undue depression of the larynx and undue stiffening of the muscles of the throat, vocal organs, and neck. It also prevents the undue lifting of the front part of the chest during inspiration, its undue depression during expiration, and also many other defects which are developed by any imperfectly coordinated person who attempts to learn "breathing" or "deep breathing," etc., guided by the unreliable sensory appreciation which is always associated with an imperfectly coordinated condition of the psycho-physical mechanism.[14]

14. Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual,* 129–133.

"Sensory Appreciation in its Relation to Happiness"

Ron Brown's *Authorised Summaries of F.M. Alexander's Four Books* were completed in the last decade of Alexander's life.[15] Alexander read and initialed each page as it was written by Brown. The importance of these *Summaries* can not be overemphasized. Here is the essence of "Sensory Appreciation in its Relation to Happiness" from Brown's summary of the last chapter of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*:

> ***True happiness is to be seen in a healthy child busily engaged in an interesting activity.***
>
> *…**The majority of adults are unhappy because they are experiencing, not an improving, but a continually deteriorating use of their psycho-physical selves.***
>
> ***Because of this internal irritation they react irritably to external experiences which would not have the least effect upon one whose sensory appreciation is reliable.****…*
>
> Confidence is born of success, and our processes in education and the general art of living must be based upon principles which will enable us to make certain of the satisfactory "means whereby" an end may be secured, and thus command for us a large percentage of those satisfactory experiences which develop confidence. ***Conscious employment of the psycho-physical mechanisms on a basis of general co-ordination in all the acts of living constitutes a real and never-ending intellectual problem of constructive control which, instead of destroying, develops the interest and general intellectual pleasure in even such ordinary acts as those of sitting down and standing up.***
>
> …People have been taught that the ordinary most oft-repeated acts of life should become automatic and unconscious, and their way of life has become confined to fixed habits in an ever more limited sphere of activity. As they grow older the defects and imperfections in their use of themselves increase and a condition of deterioration and

15. Ron Brown (1911–1955) was a journalist for the Associated Press. As a student and friend of Alexander's, from 1947, Brown wrote the summaries authorized by Alexander. In 1992, the summaries were made available to STAT Books from the Walter H. M. Carrington Archives by Alexander Murray. Brown also worked on a book to be titled *Alexander and the Doctors* which was never published. Brown succumbed to an early death due to tuberculosis and lung cancer.

> stagnation is gradually cultivated. This explains why so many people break down when they retire from work.
>
> …Man continues to rush from one extreme to another on the "end-gaining" principle in his attempts at reform or "physical" improvement. ***What probability is there that any scheme of reform will do anything but increase chaos, until the individuals concerned have been re-educated generally and reorganized as a psycho-physical unity?***[16]

Walter Carrington would comment often on the significance of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, including this exchange with Seán Carey:

> Seán: Is it true that Alexander considered *CCC* to be his most important book?
>
> Walter: Yes, he thought that *CCC* was *the* book.[17]

In his 1984 introduction to the Centerline Press edition of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, Carrington writes:

> *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* was the first book of Alexander's that I read. It was given to me by my form master at St. Paul's School, W. H. Eynon Smith. I can remember now the impression it made on me.…[18]
>
> The length of its title also attracted some adverse comment.… [Friends] urged that he should at least omit the last part, "of the Individual." To this Alexander replied, "But don't you see, that's the most important part of all!"[19]

16. Ron Brown, *Authorised Summaries of F.M. Alexander's Four Books* (London: STAT Books, 1992), 71–73.

17. Walter Carrington and Seán Carey, *Explaining the Alexander Technique: The Writings of F. Matthias Alexander* (London: Sheildrake Press, 1992), 60.

18. In *Personally Speaking* (first edition 1986), Carrington offers, "I'd never heard of this man, F. Matthias Alexander, nor his Technique. So Eynon Smith lent me one of F.M.'s books—it was *Man's Supreme Inheritance* as far as I can remember—and it made quite an impression on me." So which book did Smith give to Walter?

19. W. H. M. Carrington, introduction to *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* by F. Matthias Alexander (Long Beach: Centerline Press, 1985).

And in his foreword to the Mouritz 2004 edition of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual,* Carrington asserts:

> Of all his writings, this book, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual,* is probably the most valuable for teachers, but also for students."[20]

In her foreword to the STAT Books 1997 edition of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, Marjory Barlow writes:

> It gives me special pleasure to see this new printing, as it was this book which started me off, sixty-five years ago, on a voyage of exploration which is still continuing. As a result of my reading I went to Alexander for lessons, joined his training course for teachers, and have been teaching his work ever since I qualified in 1936.[21]

Alexander's books make available to us the steps he took—the method, evolving progressively over many years which, if followed, may lead us on the same path.

20. F. Matthias Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (London: STAT Books, 1997), xi.

21. Marjory Barlow, foreword to *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual,* by F. Matthias Alexander (London: STAT Books, 1997), 23.

CHAPTER VI

1924–1935

1924: THE LITTLE SCHOOL

In the chapter "Education and Re-Education" in *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, Alexander wrote at length on the negative consequences of schooling and the need to work to a different principle.

> Our first consideration…in all forms of education must be in regard to securing for the child the highest standard of psycho-physical functioning during his attempts to master the different processes which make up the educational scheme. In this way the child will make a fair start, and, what is more to the point, he will continue to improve the conditions involved, hand in hand with his efforts as a pupil in all other spheres of activity.[1]

A year after *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* was published, Alexander had his chance to put a new "educational scheme" into practice. As Irene Tasker relates in "Connecting Links":

> In 1924, a young boy of eight was sent home from India for lessons with F.M. He was under my guardianship so I asked F.M. if I might link up his lessons in the Technique with application to all his school lessons. F.M. concurred at once, saying "This may be just the opportunity we want." And so we started in the small back room at 16 Ashley Place and we were soon joined by other children who were having lessons in the Technique from F.M., A.R., and Miss Webb. As our numbers grew, we were moved across to the big "end room" which became known as the "Schoolroom."[2]

1. F. Matthias Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (London: Mouritz, 2004), 78.
2. Irene Tasker, "Connecting Links" (informal talk at the Constructive Teaching Centre, London, October 9, 1967), 20.

> …Professor Dewey, who visited the class for two mornings, sitting quietly in a corner while we carried on as usual, said to me on leaving "It is quite evident what you are aiming at—and I wish I were a pupil in this class!"[3]

The little school was relocated to Penhill in 1934 and Margaret Goldie replaced Tasker as director. The following year Irene moved to Johannesburg.[4]

In *Personally Speaking*, Walter Carrington includes a diary entry for December 16, 1936, about his final lesson before joining the training course:

> F.M. says that given thirty good teachers and a supply of normal children they could train several thousand a year. With a normal child only a few weeks in small classes is necessary. That is why **we must concentrate on the schools and education**.[5]

1924–1925: ANTHONY LUDOVICI

Anthony Ludovici (1882–1971) was initially a reluctant and critical pupil of Alexander. His lessons were paid for by a young admirer of Ludovici's work, Agnes Birrell, who was disappointed that he was not familiar with Alexander's teaching. She set up and paid for a series of lessons. His introductions to Alexander, and simultaneously to Birrell, give an interesting insight into both men.

> On a certain morning in late November or early December 1924, I therefore met my strange correspondent at 16 Ashley Place; and to my surprise, found that she was not the desiccated and hallucinated spinster I had imagined, but a quite attractive, bright, and intelligent young woman in her late twenties—or thereabouts.
>
> I was relegated to an easy chair by Alexander, whose personality I found it difficult at first sight to gauge, and I was invited to watch the half-hour lesson he then gave to Miss Birrell. I tried to follow closely what he was doing, and imagined that there was nothing I missed.

3. Ibid, 23.
4. In his letter of recommendation for her, John Dewey spoke of Tasker's teaching as "contributing to the physical, mental, and moral improvement of the child." Frank Pierce Jones, *Freedom to Change* (London: Mouritz, 1997), 97.
5. Walter Carrington, *Personally Speaking: Walter Carrington on the F.M. Alexander Technique in Discussion with Seán Carey* (London: Mouritz, 2001), 141.

> I found his incessant accompanying patter rather distracting, and was not impressed by its purport. He would break off from time to time and, in a deep and attractive voice, declaim a passage from Byron or Shakespeare, which seemed to me to bear little relevancy to the matter in hand. Altogether, I thought him too reminiscent of a showman, and there and then decided to have nothing to do with him.[6]

When Ludovici reluctantly began his sponsored lessons early in the following year, he was very critical.

> I got no nearer to acquiring any faith in his method. Truth to tell for some time I did not even understand what he was trying to achieve, and I often returned home to groan to my wife about the money that was being "squandered" and how much I should have preferred to see it enter our own rather than Alexander's pocket.
>
> Then gradually, and much to my surprise, I began to change my mind. Certain prophecies about me, which Alexander had made from the start, showed signs of being fulfilled to the letter. My costal arch, which was the worst feature of my poor figure, as it is of many schizothymes, was obviously opening out and widening. My threatened kyphosis had been so much diminished that an old friend, on meeting me one evening, asked me what on earth I had been doing to effect such a change in my appearance. When I breathed, my floating ribs now thrust out the lower reaches of my thorax as they had never done before, and my old waistcoats seemed hopelessly tight. I knew enough about anatomy to appreciate that probably all along my periodical "bilious" attacks had been no more than a protest on the part of the viscera in my epigastrial region at the constriction they suffered from the rigidity of my ribs; and I began to see the reason of the high incidence of dyspepsia, peptic ulcers and respiratory troubles among modern Europeans; for the loosening and widening of my thoracic cage had, among its other effects, greatly normalized my respiratory function.
>
> By the time I had been three months under Alexander, therefore, I had become as ardent a convert to his doctrines and the technique

6. Anthony M. Ludovici, "How I came to have Lessons with F.M. Alexander," in *The Philosopher's Stone: Diaries of Lessons with F. Matthias Alexander*, ed. Jean M. O. Fischer (London: Mouritz, 1998), 105.

> by which he fulfilled them as Miss Birrell herself, and by 1927, I had already published the first of my books which contained an eloquent eulogy of the teaching. (*Man: An Indictment)*
>
> It is impossible fully to describe the benefits both in health and in *joie de vivre* which I owed, and still owe, to this radical alteration in my physique; for although nothing could of course correct all my constitutional failings, I was a changed man. When, therefore I say, as I did on a previous page, that the learning of conscious control was the most precious of all the contributions on the question of health that came to me during the years between the outbreak of World War I and 1925, I am not exaggerating. It has certainly prolonged my life.[7]

Ludovici was forty-three years old when he took his lessons with Alexander in 1925. His life was prolonged for an additional forty-six years.

MAGNUS AND ALEXANDER

Rudolf Magnus (1873–1927) was a German professor of pharmacology at the University of Utrecht. Much of his research on reflex physiology was inspired by the great British neuroscientist, Charles Sherrington. In 1924, Magnus published his work on the physiology of posture, *Körperstellung,* delivering lectures on his findings in London and Edinburgh. Michael Bloch writes:

> In brief, Magnus concluded that the postural mechanism is controlled by a "central apparatus" located in "the sub-cortical area of the brain-stem"; that posture is consequently influenced by the position of the head ("where the head leads the body follows"); and that the efficiency of this "central apparatus" depends on **"the right interpretation of all sensory impression."** Macdonald and other medical supporters of F.M. were quick to declare that these findings represented a striking scientific affirmation of principles which F.M. had been teaching for almost thirty years.[8]

7. Ludovici, 107–108.

8. Michael Bloch, *The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander: Founder of the Alexander Technique* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 132.

1925: "AN UNRECOGNIZED PRINCIPLE IN HUMAN BEHAVIOR"

One of Alexander's earliest references to Magnus's work and to the "central control" is in his lecture of February 19, 1925, "An Unrecognized Principle in Human Behavior," given to the Child-Study Society at the invitation of one of his supporters, Dr. MacLeod Yearsley. The lecture is a particularly accessible account of Alexander's teaching at the time.

> The first thing that I did was to attempt to raise **the sensory consciousness** {the standard of consciousness} of what was really happening in that person.[9]
>
> …**when the pupil comes into the room…I ask him to sit down in the chair…and when he has sat down in the chair, I have the history of his life's use of himself**.[10]
>
> …We ask this person to sit down and we find in sitting down, the head is pulled back more or less, an indication more or less of interference with the general use of the mechanism.…when the person sits on the chair,…for it will be evident that he is very much occupied in making a further and unnecessary movement on the lines of closing a concertina, ending in a slumped attitude when sitting on the chair. Such behavior interferes with the act of getting out of the chair. It is obvious that in sitting down, all one needs to do is to allow the chair to support one, after one touches the chair. No other movement is necessary.
>
> …I can't conceive of the use of that self except as a psycho–physical unit.[11]
>
> When John Dewey read the manuscript of my last book, he came in to me one morning and said, "Alexander, I am delighted that you hit upon that wonderful **principle of non-doing** in your technique." …He had just come back from China and said, "I find that was the philosophy of the Chinese philosophers 3,000 years before Christ."
>
> When I ask my pupil to sit down, which I am going to do again in order to work out my technique, he, of course, says, "Oh, yes, I will sit

9. F. Matthias Alexander, "An Unrecognized Principle in Human Behavior," in *Articles and Lectures: Articles, Published Letters and Lectures on the F.M. Alexander Technique,* ed. Jean M. O. Fischer (London: Mouritz, 1995), 143.

10. Ibid, 145.

11. Ibid, 146.

down." Immediately he sits, his old subconscious habits take charge of him, and he sits down exactly as he sat down before he came to me.[12]

…I ask the person to inhibit a desire to sit down.…he consents to do that. Therefore, it is not an inhibition associated with suppression.

…This time I explain to him when I ask him to sit down, that he is to say "no." Once he gets to the point that I can give him that order and he indulges in **non-doing**, simply refuses to do anything, I then explain to him the guiding orders which I wish him to deal with.… Regarding the central control: in the technique I am using,…Magnus has worked to explain the scientific significance.…The direction of the head and neck being of primary importance, he found as I found, that if we get the right direction from this primary control, the control of the rest of the organism is a simple matter.[13]

Here is an obviously simple thing. If I am going to sit down in the chair, if you are following the principle of non-doing, you must not pull yourself into the chair, I know that I am merely going to order my neck to relax, my head to go forward until I touch the chair, and when I touch the chair, I shall just continue to give my orders and allow the chair to support me.[14]

1926: LETTER FROM ALEXANDER TO JOHN DEWEY

In his letter of October 22, 1926, Alexander wrote to Dewey about Magnus:

> Quite recently the experiments of Magnus have been published in *The Lancet* and the findings constitute a correlation of the technique, a fact I know will please you. We now have a justification of our belief in the fundamental nature of the work in the proof from the so-called purely scientific side. **My own new book** should be through by the end of the year and I think it will interest you. I am putting the biggest man in medicine in England in his proper place and also medical training.[15]

12. Ibid, 147.

13. Ibid, 148.

14. Ibid, 150.

15. Alexander's reference to "the biggest man in medicine in England" is to Lord Dawson and Dawson's 1926 address to the House of Commons. Since Alexander's letter shows that *The Use of the Self* was in the works from 1926, it is unlikely that it was written specifically for the first training course, launched in 1931.

In this same letter, Alexander wrote:

> Ludovici's book—*Man: An Indictment* comes out in January. The constructive side is the work and it is being published by Constable.[16]

FROM CENTRAL CONTROL TO PRIMARY CONTROL

Anthony Ludovici's 1927 book, *Man: An Indictment,* includes an extended reflection on the experience of a restored "central control."

> …the recovery of one's lost central control is probably one of the most wonderful experiences it is possible to have…
>
> It is impossible to describe in words how the recovery of the central control is achieved inside the individual, or what it feels like.…No phraseology, however skillful, can define a sensation. One can only say that **it consists of restoring healthy perceptions to the sensory-motor system**. But the mechanical process by which this is done is the following: On the threshold of every action the instinctive reflexes which are prepared to direct the individual in its accomplishment are inhibited by an act of will. For instance, the moment it occurs to him to get up, the old muscular reactions are inhibited and he sits still.
>
> Then the expert, who is aware of the correct coordinations required for the movement, performs the action for him, by seizing his body in such a way that the central control operates from the neck downwards and causes the body of the learner to move correctly from the chair. This constitutes a muscular experience which must be undergone to be known, and is the first valuable lesson. From that moment, an alert pupil knows something which he could not have known before—the difference between his former faulty and unconscious lift out of the chair, and his new and correctly coordinated lift out of it. This is the beginning and it is gradually built upon until two standards take shape in consciousness—the new standard with all that it means in the matter of eliminated vicious strains and pressures, and the old standard with its vicious strains and pressures, vividly felt for the first time. Thus the sensory appreciation, by being re-educated, gradually serves as a check—as it always should do—to vicious and

16. F. Matthias Alexander. *F.M. Alexander to John Dewey, October 22, 1926,* letter, from Southern Illinois University, Morris Library, *The Dewey Collection.*

> harmful movements of the body; and with this change, the further remarkable change of a chastened consciousness (a consciousness no longer reflecting a debauched bony and muscular structure) comes into being.
>
> Gradually (the change is slow because it consists largely of re-growth) the thoracic capacity increases, the back straightens, the nerves recover serenity, functions tend to normalize, the heart is no longer hemmed in and regains its harmonious relation to the rest of the system, and, with the expansion of the thorax, oxidation becomes adequate, irritants are removed from the blood, which otherwise cause the partial toxaemia of debility, rheumatism, gout, etc., and the individual begins to enjoy that physical resistance which is called immunity. The psychical life naturally shares in this general recovery of well-being. Reactions become more controlled, suggestibility loses its acuteness, the basis of character which is resistance (and the counterpart to physical immunity) is formed, concepts become more real, and the quality of sanity, so little understood nowadays, appears as a permanent possession. The uncontrolled man who, to the rest of the world seems normal, then begins to strike the pupil as merely a "border-line case" the gravity of whose automatisms is not sufficiently acute to lead to his confinement.
>
> And these changes, as they appear, startle the individual, not only as strangers within the precincts of his inner life, but also as the extraordinary and punctual fulfilment of what the genial discoverer of this method of re-education never fails to prophesy from the start as the inevitable outcome of his teaching.[17]

Alexander's "new book," mentioned in his letter to Dewey, would be *The Use of the Self*, published in 1932. In it the central control becomes the primary control:

> That fact that I was able, through my employment of the primary control, to bring about such an improvement in my reaction to the stimulus to use my voice that vocal activity did not result in hoarseness, is proof that quite early in my experiences a practical means had been found, whereby my habitual reflex activity was "conditioned" as

17. Anthony M. Ludovici, *Man: An Indictment* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1927), 355–357. See also Appendix III, page 169 in this book.

> a natural consequence of the procedure adopted, since the new reflex activity to which it was changed *in the process* was associated with new and improved general conditions of use and functioning.*
>
> *In this connection the following quotation from a paper read by Dr. A. Murdoch, of Bexhill-on-Sea, at the St. Andrews (James Mackenzie) Institute on March 6, 1928, may be of interest:
>
> *Mr. Alexander has built up the theory on which he has based his practice from the observation of the movements of the body as a whole, and he has made use of lost or unused associated involuntary reflexes with a rare insight, and by recreating them into new conditioned reflexes he has laid the foundation for a new outlook on disease and its diagnosis and treatment.*[18]

That Alexander's own understanding of the primary control was not necessarily limited by Magnus's central control would be revealed in a letter to Frank Pierce Jones in 1945, where he cautions Jones about a too fixed understanding of the primary control.

> I don't see how they can misinterpret the head and neck relationship. People understand the effect of different positions and, for instance, that with the horse, the fixed reins interfere harmfully with the efficiency in going up a hill in particular. We always use the head and neck relationship when explaining to outsiders and find it works. There really isn't a primary control as such. It becomes a something in the sphere of relativity. [19]

1928: *THE CHILD AND THE WORLD: DIALOGUES IN MODERN EDUCATION* BY MARGARET NAUMBURG

At this time, Margaret Naumburg was director of the Walden School of New York. In *The Child and the World: Dialogues in Modern Education* (1928), she

18. F.M. Alexander, *The Use of the Self,* (London: Orion, 2001), 50. Andrew Murdoch (1862?–1943), Scottish medical officer and surgeon. He began lessons in 1923, became a great friend, supporter, and horse racing companion to Alexander. Murdoch, like other doctor supporters, would have taken the Hippocratic Oath: First, do no harm. Hippocrates, *Epidemics,* Book I, Chapter 2: "As to diseases, make a habit of two things—to help, or at least, to do no harm." For Alexander, "Stop what is wrong."

19. F.M. Alexander, *F.M. Alexander to Frank Pierce Jones, December 1945,* letter, copy from Frank Pierce Jones to Alexander D. Murray.

offers insights gained from Alexander, including this exchange in the chapter "A University Professor and the Director."

Director [Naumburg]: I shall want you presently to raise the chair from the ground with your two hands. But make no move to that end at present. Only note, without shifting any part of your body, the general position of your legs, arms, head, back and so forth. Just observe the amount of tension with which your arms and hands are grasping that chair preparatory to lifting it.

Professor: Yes, I've done so.

Director: And now will you drop your arms to your sides again and just let *me* place your two arms for you on the back of the chair. No, don't tense them. Leave them for me to pick up for you, so to speak. So. Now they are placed for you without tension.

Professor: Yes, and now—

Director: Your hands are resting lightly against the top rim of the chair. Will you now try the experiment of pressing your fingers against the chair top with just the minimum of contraction necessary to lift it off the ground. (Professor *attempts to follow directions.*) No. Stop a moment; relax your fingers again. Were you aware that as you tensed your fingers to lift the chair you stiffened your right knee and jerked your shoulders slightly?

Professor: No. Really?

Director: Now just try to think of relaxing your right knee and your shoulders *in order* to contract your fingers to lift the chair with the minimum of effort.

That time you did it perfectly.

Professor: I see now. In that simple act of lifting that chair I was bringing to bear a false preconception of the amount of effort needed to raise its weight.

Director: Yes. You were contracted and set for the effort before you met the resistant obstacle. And instead of using just the degree of muscular effort demanded by the task of raising the chair, you had probably expended ten times that energy in preparing for the act itself. Your

> emphasis was on the end instead of the means––the intermediate steps by which it could be attained without strain or effort.[20]

Naumburg continues by asking the professor to stand on one leg. He shifts his weight in preparation which she is quick to point out.

Naumburg had been married to Waldo Frank. By this time, the marriage had ended. Frank remarried, and his second wife Alma joined Alexander's training course. Their daughter Deborah Caplan would be one of the founders of the American Center for the Alexander Technique, New York.

1930: "OPEN LETTER TO INTENDING STUDENTS OF TRAINING COURSE"

On July 22, 1930, Alexander published an "Open Letter to Intending Students of Training Course." This letter was included as an appendix to *The Use of the Self* (1932).

As of February 1931, those enrolled in the first training course were: Irene Stewart, Erika Schumann (Whittaker), Jean MacInnes, Marjorie Barstow, Lulie Westfeldt, Gurney MacInnes, and George Trevelyan.[21]

During the next three years: Catharine (Kitty) Merrick (Wielopolska), Patrick Macdonald, Charles Neil, Marjory Mechin (Barlow), and Maxwell Alexander joined Alexander's training course.[22]

The first five students ranged in age from Erika Schumann, 19, to Lulie Westfeldt, 36.

All enrolled after a considerable number of lessons from the Alexanders. Erika, at an early age, had lessons from her aunt, Ethel Webb. Marjorie Barstow had six months of lessons in 1926. Lulie had forty lessons (at considerably reduced price) in 1929. Pat Macdonald, who joined the second year of the course, had his first lessons in 1925 at 10 years old. Jean MacInnes had

20. Margaret Naumburg, *The Child and the World: Dialogues in Modern Education* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1928), 263–265.

21. Irene Stewart (1906–1990), Erika Schumann (1912–2004), Jean MacInnes (1907–), Marjorie Barstow (1899–1995), Lulie Westfeldt (1895–1965), Gurney MacInnes (1906–), George Trevelyan (1906–1996). Barstow and Westfeldt were from the United States.

22. Catharine (Kitty) Merrick (1900–1985), Patrick Macdonald (1910–1991), Charles Neil (1917–1958), Marjory Mechin (1915–2006), Maxwell Alexander (1916–1997). Merrick was from the United States.

been a pupil in the little school. Kitty Merrick, 31, had lessons in the summer of 1929.

The training course met at Ashley Place and was carried on until 1940 when Alexander left England because of the war. It was not resumed until after Alexander's return to London in 1945.[23]

DEWEY: *EXPERIENCE AND NATURE* AND *THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY*

Throughout the 1920s, John Dewey remained closely engaged with Alexander's work. In 1925, Dewey delivered the first set of Carus Lectures, later compiled into *Experience and Nature*.[24] The following introduces Alexander in a footnote and bears study and understanding as evidence of the reciprocal influence of the two men.

> In terms of a **conscious control** of inclusive wholes, search for those links which occupy key positions and which affect **critical connections** is indispensable. But recovery of sanity depends upon seeing and **using** these specifiable things *as* links functionally significant **in a process.** To see the organism *in* nature, the nervous system in the organism, the brain in the nervous system, the cortex in the brain is the answer to the problems which haunt philosophy. And when thus seen they will be seen to be *in*, not as marbles are in a box but as events are in history, in a moving, growing never finished process. Until we have a procedure in actual practice which demonstrates this continuity, we shall continue to engage in appealing to some other specific thing, some other broken off affair, to restore connectedness and unity—calling the specific religion or reform or whatever specific

23. Stafford Cripps, "Tribute to a 'Great Teacher,' " *The Alexander Journal* No. 1 (1962), 5.

24. The Carus Lectures, funded by Open Court Publishing Company, are named in honor of Paul Carus. German-born, Carus lived in LaSalle, Illinois, where a family member founded Open Court to provide a forum for the discussion of philosophy, science, and religion. The series of three lectures are presented over three consecutive days in plenary sessions at a divisional meeting of the American Philosophical Association.

> is the fashionable cure of the period. Thus we increase the disease in the means used to cure it.*
>
> *See F. Matthias Alexander's *Man's Supreme Inheritance,* and *Conscious Constructive Control* [*sic*].[25]

In 1929, Dewey was honored to deliver the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh for two years, from 1928 to 1929, which would be published as *The Quest for Certainty*. It was during this trip to the United Kingdom that he visited the little school. Alexander noted the trip in a letter to Robert Geuns.

> When John Dewey decided to give the Gifford Lectures, he came to London and had a daily lesson for some two months and the lecture which he wrote during that time and delivered in these lectures is the subject matter of his book *The Quest for Certainty.*[26]

Alexander had been working on his third book since 1926. In 1929, he asked Margaret Goldie to take over some of Tasker's responsibilities at the little school so that she would be free to help him with the book.[27] On May 11, 1931, Dewey wrote to Albert Barnes:

> We moved last summer and then I went to Nova Scotia, and then towards the end of August to Vienna—Lucy [Dewey's daughter] lost

25. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958), 295. A recommended further study of "consciousness" is Gerald M. Edelman's *Second Nature*: *Brain Science and Human Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 2–4. From the introduction:

> This book is the result of a line of thought leading to what I have called brain-based epistemology. This term refers to efforts to ground the theory of knowledge in an understanding of how the brain works. It is an extension of the notion of naturalized epistemology, a proposal made by the philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine.
>
> My line of argument differs from his, which stopped, as it were, at the skin and other sensory receptors. I deal with the issue by considering a wider-ranging interaction [Dewey would say "trans-action"]—**that between brain, body and environment.…I follow in the footsteps of William James, who pointed out that consciousness is a process whose function is knowing**."

26. F.M. Alexander. *F.M. Alexander to Robert Geuns, January 9, 1951,* letter, copy from Robert Geuns to Alexander D. Murray.

27. Michael Bloch, *The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander: Founder of the Alexander Technique* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 141. Tasker remembers beginning work on *The Use of the Self* as early as 1920 ("Connecting Links"). It seems more likely that she was working with Alexander on *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, published in 1923, though it is possible that the chapters on "The Golfer Who Cannot Keep his Eyes on the Ball" and "The Stutterer" were drafted at that time.

> her little girl, from intestinal constriction, and so I went over which I hadn't planned to do. Alexander met me in Bremen and we went to Southampton together. He is just getting out another book.[28]

This may have been when Dewey's introduction for *The Use of the Self* was given to Alexander.

1932: DEWEY, ALEXANDER, AND *THE USE OF THE SELF*

The mutual respect of the two men is clearly visible in both Dewey's introduction and Alexander's opening chapter. In *How We Think* (1910, republished in 1931), Dewey had presented "The Analysis of a Complete Act of Thought."

> Upon examination, each instance reveals, more or less clearly, five logically distinct steps:
>
> (i) a felt difficulty;
>
> (ii) its location and definition;
>
> (iii) suggestion of possible solution;
>
> (iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion;
>
> (v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief.[29]

The first chapter of *The Use of the Self*, "The Evolution of a Technique," demonstrates Alexander's process as that of a Deweyan scientist.

After struggling with the (i) "felt difficulty"[30] of the loss of his voice while performing, Alexander becomes aware (ii) of his habit of "gasping" and "sucking in air." He consults a doctor, who (iii) prescribes vocal rest. But when he returns to the stage, Alexander's voice loss also returns and so he concludes (iv and v) that it was "something which he was doing" which caused the voice

28. John Dewey. *John Dewey to Albert Barnes, May 11, 1931,* letter, from Southern Illinois University, Morris Library, *The Dewey Collection*. Albert C. Barnes (1872–1951) was a businessman, art collector, and philanthropist who became a friend and supporter of John Dewey.

29. John Dewey, *How We Think* (New York: D. C. Heath & Co., 1910), 73.

30. All quotes used in this summary of "The Evolution of a Technique" are from Ron Brown, *Authorised Summaries of F.M. Alexander's Four Books* (London: STAT Books, 1992), 77–82.

loss. At each subsequent stage of investigation, new difficulties emerge which lead to further experimentation and deeper insight. The principles of the work emerge from the narrative of Alexander's explorations.

He discovers that his hoarseness is linked to the pulling back of his head and the depressing of his larynx, and that when he refrains from pulling back his head, his hoarseness improves. Thus, use affects functioning.

Struggling to reliably "put his head forward and up," he discovers that he must at the same time overcome his tendency to shorten in stature. After experimenting, he finds that the best "vocal and respiratory conditions" were associated with a lengthening stature, which could only be brought about when the head was put forward and up. This relationship proves to be the "Primary Control of the General Use of the Self."

Working with mirrors, Alexander is surprised to discover that he is still pulling his head back, in spite of his best intentions. This leads to the realization that his feeling has become untrustworthy and that his directions are dominated by habit. It is only when he inhibits his "immediate response to speak" that he gains control over the "critical moment" when he might either revert to habit, or direct his use to new ends. Inhibition (non-doing) is postponing action:

> While still continuing to project the directions for the new use I would stop and consciously reconsider my first decision, and ask myself: Shall I after all go on to gain the end I have decided upon and speak the sentence? Or shall I not? Or shall I go on to gain some other end altogether *and then and there make a fresh decision*:
>
> either
>
> not to gain my original end, in which case *I would continue to project the directions for maintaining the new use* and not go on to speak the sentence;
>
> or
>
> to change my end and do something different, say, lift my hand instead of speaking the sentence, in which case *I would continue to project the directions for maintaining the new use* to to carry out this last decision and lift my hand;
>
> or

> to go on after all and gain my original end, in which case *I would continue to project the directions for maintaining the new use* to speak the sentence.[31]

"Directions" have replaced "orders," a word Dewey disliked.

The Use of the Self also includes chapters on "The Golfer" and "The Stutterer," expanded from earlier accounts of lessons, and a "Diagnosis and Medical Training" chapter, with Alexander's critical remarks on Lord Dawson's 1926 address to the House of Commons.[32]

Dewey's influence on Alexander is notable from their initial 1916 meeting until the publication of *The Use of the Self*. In the 1930s their friendship cooled when Alexander declined to be involved in a scientific study of childhood development. Dewey's interest in this study was such that he postponed the writing of his *Logic* until the results of the work of his protégé, Myrtle McGraw, had been made public.[33] Dewey's personal contact with A. R. continued and in 1938 he was still having lessons with him when he wrote:

> The crucial educational problem is that of procuring the postponement of immediate action on desire until observation and judgment have intervened.[34]

And, in 1939, Dewey added this final paragraph to the official John Dewey biography composed by his daughter Jane:

> My theories of mind-body, of the coordination of the active elements of the self and of the place of ideas in inhibition and control of overt action required (for confirmation) contact with the work of F.M. Alexander and in later years his brother A. R. to transform them into realities.[35]

31. Alexander, *The Use of the Self*, 46.
32. Lord Bertrand Dawson of Penn, "Medical Practice by the Unqualified" (address to the House of Commons, London, February 24, 1926). See footnote 15.
33. Thomas C. Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey: Dilemmas of a Philosopher and Naturalist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 236–238.
34. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier, 1972), 69.
35. Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, vol. 1 of *Library of Living Philosophers* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1970), 7.

Eric David McCormack's invaluable study, *Frederick Matthias Alexander and John Dewey: A Neglected Influence*, was inspired by these words from Dewey.[36]

By the time *The Use of the Self* was published, Alexander's skill was remarkable, the result of considerable prior experience. Nearly forty years had been spent in its development. He later told Jones he could achieve in three days results that had taken him three weeks before.

1933: *HEALTH AND EDUCATION THROUGH SELF-MASTERY* BY LUDOVICI

Other than Alexander himself, Ludovici was the first to write a book on Alexander's method. Lulie Westfeldt refers to Ludovici's book in her 1964 account of her training, *F. Matthias Alexander: The Man and His Work*.

> Anthony Ludovici, a writer and pupil of Alexander's, was planning to write a book on Alexander's work to be called *Health and Education through Self-Mastery*.…We talked in class about Ludovici's book from time to time.[37]

1934: BEDFORD PHYSICAL TRAINING COLLEGE LECTURE

On Friday, August 3, 1934, Alexander gave a lecture to the women of the Bedford Physical Training College. Irene Tasker recorded it in shorthand and later typed it. The training course students were all present and Alexander covered the principles of the work, primary control, inhibition, and direction, with great clarity before demonstrating on two of the Bedford students. This is the most extensive of the three recorded talks and worthy of careful study. It shows the clarity with which he expounded his ideas and is in contrast with Westfeld's criticisms of his inability (or unwillingness) to communicate in the training course. He includes his aphorism that:

> **Belief is a certain standard of muscle tension**.[38]

36. Eric David McCormack (1911–1963), a Benedictine monk, who wrote his thesis on Alexander and Dewey, at the University of Toronto (1958). His thesis mentor was Frank Pierce Jones. See Appendix II for an excerpt from his dissertation.

37. Lulie Westfeldt, *F. Matthias Alexander: The Man and his Work* (London: Mouritz, 1998), 52–53.

38. Alexander, "Bedford Physical Training College Lecture," in *Articles and Lectures*, 174.

And repeats his earlier advice in *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* to everybody in the world,

> **to sit down and think over all the beliefs and ideas they have got and find out where they came from. You would not have many left. After a week's thought, you would throw them overboard**.[39]

This may be a reference to his first attempt to write a book on the voyage from Australia in 1904. He threw his manuscript overboard before arriving in England.[40]

1935: IRENE TASKER TO JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

In 1935, Irene Tasker left England for Johannesburg, South Africa. She had her first lesson with Alexander in 1913, had been his assistant since 1917, was a beloved teacher at the little school, and had been indispensible in the writing

39. Ibid, 172.

40. Alexander's story brings to mind James Miller's account of Descartes's *Discourse* from November 10, 1619, in his *Examined Lives: From Socrates to Nietzsche* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 207–208:

> "I stayed all day shut up alone in a stove-heated room," Descartes writes in *Discourse on the Method*, "where I was completely free to converse with myself about my own thoughts."
>
> He recalls how his reading of philosophy had left him uncertain about its value, since it seemed that "nothing can be imagined which is too strange or incredible to have been said by some philosopher." Abandoning the study of letters, he acquired a law degree and set out to survey the larger world. Perhaps in hopes of fulfilling his father's wish that he enter politics, he "considered the customs of other men, only to find almost as much diversity as I had found previously among the philosophers."
>
> He had spent some time learning from "the book of the world."
>
> Now he resolved to "study also myself" and "to use all the power of my mind to choose the paths I should follow."
>
> Alone in his stove-heated room and free to meditate at will, Descartes first thought about how much more perfect were the works created by one man: a sole city planner, a single architect, a solitary lawgiver such as Spartas's legendary Lycurgus. "And so I thought that since the sciences contained in books…is amassed little by little from the opinions of many different persons, it never comes so close to the truth as the simple reasoning which a man of good sense naturally makes concerning whatever he comes across."
>
> **He concluded that it might be wise to jettison his prior beliefs "all at one go, in order to replace them afterwards with better ones, or with the same ones once I had squared them with the standards of reason."**

Note that Frank Pierce Jones concludes *Freedom to Change*, on page 203, with "I will end up with a quote from Socrates: For a human being, an unexamined life is not worth living." And Marjory Barlow titled her interview biography *An Examined Life*.

of the second edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual,* and *The Use of the Self*. Many years later, she was asked to reflect on her fifty years of teaching and which experiences had taught her the most.

> I think that the fourteen years during which I traveled to and from South Africa gave me the invaluable experience of combining starting out on my own and pioneering in a country new to the work, and returning to base, where I had refresher lessons with F.M. You see, when I first went out in 1935 I had never taken a pupil right through from the beginning, I had up till then "assisted" with the pupils at Ashley Place or done application work. I had never had complete responsibility. I remember telling F.M. of my diffidence about this, shortly before I left. I asked him: "Shall I ever develop the necessary subtle use of the hands, when I have come to this stage in my teaching from such a different route—not given actual lessons in the Technique that is, but just done the application work?" He replied, "**Yes—you will find yourself developing the subtle use of the hands as you go along still teaching from your own approach**." I said, "But one must never set out to develop it." "Of course not," he replied. (I made a note of this conversation which gave me solace on many occasions when far away.)[41]

The exchange brings to mind the story from Rudyard Kipling that Alexander would include in his "Preface to New Edition" of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (1945):

> I believe that man can escape from the serious situation in which he finds himself only by facing the bitter truth that "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves…." I am reminded here of an old fable retold by the late Rudyard Kipling at a gathering in London. As I remember it, it went as follows:
>
> The younger gods had offended against the holy law and were waiting for judgment in the Great Hall of Destiny. The elder god pondered long on a fitting punishment and finally gave his verdict. But the younger gods only smiled at one another and made no protest. Whereupon the elder god thundered: "Be not so light-hearted. You

41. Tasker, 26.

shall suffer this punishment for infinite time, unless you can discover the secret that will gain your release. But I warn you, this secret is safely hid."

At this, the younger gods cried out: "Oh where, most merciful one, shall we begin to look? All things are known to the gods. What more must we find out? Besides, being gods, who is there with power greater than ours to help us?" At this the Great Hall echoed with the laughter of the elder god. "The secret should not be hard to find," he answered. "I have hidden it within you. Look there!" And he roared with laughter at his own jest.[42]

Irene Tasker would return from South Africa in 1949.

42. F. Matthias Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance: Conscious Guidance and Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* (London: Mouritz, 1996), xv.

CHAPTER VII

1935–1954

1935–1936: ALDOUS HUXLEY

Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) began having lessons with Alexander in the fall of 1935. Huxley, who had stalled while writing *Eyeless in Gaza*, began to write again and published it in July 1936. *Ends and Means* came out the following year. Both books, as well as subsequent books by Huxley include content influenced by Alexander.[1] Alexander's *The Universal Constant in Living* (1941) was in progress before *Ends and Means* (1937) was published. In *Ends and Means,* Huxley notes:

> No verbal description can do justice to a technique which involves the changing…of an individual's sensory experiences. One cannot describe the experience of seeing the color, red. Similarly one cannot describe the much more complex experience of improved physical coordination. A verbal description would mean something only to a person who had actually had the experience described; to the mal-coordinated person, the same words would mean something quite different. Inevitably, he would interpret them in terms of his own sensory experiences, which are those of a mal-coordinated person. Complete understanding of the system can come only with the practice of it.[2]

And again:

> a technique…working (by a kind of organic analogy) to inhibit undesirable impulses and irrelevance on the emotional and intellectual levels respectively. We cannot ask more from any system of physical

1. Frank Pierce Jones, *Freedom to Change: The Development and Science of The Alexander Technique* (London: Mouritz, 1997), 55–56.
2. Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), 223.

> education; nor, if we seriously desire to alter human beings in a desirable direction, can we ask any less.[3]

Finally, Huxley points out that Alexander's work

> is valuable, among other reasons, as a means for increasing conscious control of the body, and, in this way, raising a human being from a condition of physical unawareness to a state of physical self-consciousness and self-control. Such physical self-awareness and self-control leads to, and to some extent is actually a form of, mental and moral self-awareness and self-control.[4]

Withholding or non-doing is a subject favored by both Huxley and Alexander. **Detachment**, another favorite term of Huxley's, would be emphasized in Alexander's *Knowing How to Stop* (1946).[5]

1936–1938: DIARY OF GEORGE TREVELYAN

As one of those enrolled in Alexander's 1931 training course, George Trevelyan later wrote his reflections on why he "took up Alexander's work." He also kept a diary of his teaching from December 1936 to December 1938.

> He looked at me, felt me with his hands and said, "Young man, what have you been doing to yourself?" He made me make some movements as in fencing (a sport in which I indulged a great deal and with much skill) and to my surprise raised his hands in horror. Then he expounded—I was using myself abominably—I had cultivated unconscious habits which felt quite right but in fact were pulling my poor body out of shape and creating pressures and tensions, pushing organs into the wrong places and so forth. I was stiffening my neck and pulling my head back; I had got my back pulled right in and it had fixed

3, Ibid, 224.

4. Ibid, 326.

5. *Knowing How to Stop* was originally a small (hardcover) booklet edited by Wilfred Barlow and published by Fred Watts. It included mostly previously published articles, one of which was Frank Pierce Jones's 1943 talk to the parents of the Media Friends School (*Collected Writings,* 11). The foreword was Alexander's chapter, "Knowing How to Stop" in the U.K. edition of *The Universal Constant in Living,* but not the U.S. edition. The articles were republished in *The Alexander Journal* No. 4 (Spring 1965; reprinted 1970).

there as if the framework of the lung was battered in. This in itself threw out of gear the great and strong muscle sets in the back; throwing the strain onto the wrong sets, notably those of the neck, which resulted in the head dragging back even more and the wretched vertebrae being ground down one upon the other. He pointed out to me a thing I'd never thought of before. I was *doing* these things myself. *I* was doing them. They weren't merely my misfortune but I myself was positively pulling my body out of shape by what I did with it as I walked and fenced and ran. Each time I lunged, in went the back and back came the head (or more correctly, pulled my back in and my head back). Even when I walked I stiffened the neck and held my chest rigid, which in itself pulled the back in. No wonder Alexander had said, "Young man, what have you been doing to yourself?"[6]

[W]hen Alexander altered the adjustments for the better and put me nearer into normal shape with his skilled hands, it felt entirely wrong, ridiculously *out of shape*.…[7]

"A man hasn't lived until he can widen his back," said F.M.[8]

Wednesday, February 17, 1937

Until one wakes in the morning with the knowledge of what it is to have a widened back one doesn't know what it is to be alive. This F.M. said with an almost passionate fervor.[9]

Friday, April 9, 1937

Asked what he considered the essential way for a sedentary worker to keep in condition, F.M. said without hesitation, "**The whispered 'ah' particularly over the chair**." **Also putting knees away till you reach the floor**, **slowly, and in full control while length is kept**.[10] **Fresh air**, **of course**, ***must*** **be had**, **and for this walking should give all the necessary tone if the primary control is not put wrong**. **Anyone**

6. George Trevelyan, "The Diary of Sir George Trevelyan," in *The Philosopher's Stone: Diaries of Lessons with F. Matthias Alexander,* ed. Jean M. O. Fischer (London: Mouritz, 1998), 66.
7. Ibid, 68.
8. Ibid, 71.
9. Ibid, 87.
10. A concise description of squatting.

> **can discover exercises for themselves.** It is absurd to lay down for another what and how much he should do. That must surely be left to the discretion of the individual, as must food to a great extent, and the ideal state of sensitivity is when the body has a real and true craving for a particular food or of clearing the blood by perspiration and exercise.[11]

1938: IRENE TASKER

During the fourteen years she lived in South Africa, Irene Tasker visited England twice. In "Connecting Links," she remembers:

> When I was in England in 1938, F.M. had a refresher course in which I was very glad to join. During this same leave I helped F.M. throughout a course of lessons he gave my brother who had come home from India in a very bad condition of health. A "collapsed man" as F.M. described him. I watched and helped in each lesson, then did lying down work and whispered "ahs" with my brother at home in between. I still have the notes I made about these lessons and one instruction F.M. gave him has remained vividly with me ever since. After explaining how the coming forward movement in the chair always makes people cramp the chest and shorten, he said, "**Never let the body overrun the head in coming forward: Never let the head overrun the body in going backward.**"[12]
>
> I did not get to London until the end of January 1944—the voyage took six weeks.…I learned much from a few lessons I had with F.M. shortly after my return. He found I had been exaggerating the non-doing to the extent of not permitting the right doing to go through (this from notes made at the time). Inhibition *as such* I realized from these lessons, could be as harmful, as any other over-emphasis. "The other extreme of too hasty reaction" F.M. went on "is drift." I remember in this connection Dr. Dewey's reply to someone who compared F.M.'s principle of inhibition with the "non-doing" of ancient Chinese

11. Ibid, 96.

12. Irene Tasker, "Connecting Links." Informal talk at the Constructive Teaching Centre, London, October 9, 1967.

> philosophy—"Ah," said Dr. Dewey, "but they did not have Alexander's constructive 'means' on the other side."[13]

1941: *THE UNIVERSAL CONSTANT IN LIVING*

Alexander began working on his fourth book in 1939. He opens the first chapter of *The Universal Constant in Living* with an epigraph from Ludwig Kast which includes:

> behavior first appears as **a total reaction of the organism**, which is integrated from the beginning.[14]

And then, referring to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Alexander writes:

> Few of us hitherto have given consideration to the question of the extent to which we are individually responsible for the ills that our flesh is heir to; this, because we have not come to a realization of the faulty and often harmful manner in which we use ourselves in our daily activities.[15]

As with his earlier books, Alexander enlisted help in writing *The Universal Constant in Living*. In his foreword to the book, Walter Carrington remembers:

> In my day he would go down to his country house, Penhill, at the weekend and often return on Monday morning with several pages of notes that he had jotted down. It was my task to take these notes, decipher them, and type them up with double spacing on the office typewriter. Afterwards, Miss Webb, his secretary, would read them and at some convenient moment, later in the week, we would return

13. Ibid, 25.

14. F. Matthias Alexander, *The Universal Constant in Living* (London: Mouritz, 2000), 3. Ludwig Kast (1877–1941) was a German-born physician who took lessons with Alexander. He was on the faculty of New York Post-Graduate Medical School as a professor of clinical medicine and was president of the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation. The Macy Foundation sponsored Dewey's protégé Myrtle McGraw's research on the infant's process of growth in behavioral and motor development. She worked with project director and neurologist Frederick Tilney and neuroembryologist George Coghill. McGraw had some contact with A.R. See Thomas C. Dalton's *Becoming John Dewey: Dilemmas of a Philosopher and Naturalist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

15. Ibid.

> them to F.M., and the three of us would sit down together to look them over. F.M. always read very slowly and carefully. After a time he would, perhaps, say: "Now this part ought to go into the chapter on change" or "this must be added to the chapter on prevention." Sometimes there were only a few corrections to make, but at other times he would point out that I had misread his writing and the sentence would be altered. Often we would say: "What do you mean by this?" And he would explain, and sometimes we would respond: "But that is not what you have written." He would look again and make a correction. Occasionally his alterations would run into half a page, as he expanded his original idea.
>
> After the session, I would retype the draft, and we would take it away and study it and perhaps propose some further alterations. But when we took it back he might say: "No, that is not at all what I meant!" Or he might write a whole new paragraph. This was the manner of his writing: a constant search for clarity, for the use of the right word. It was more like the meticulous drafting of a legal document than writing a chronicle of thoughts and experiences.[16]

When asked about Alexander's reading outside the work, Marjory Barlow said, "He was writing all the time."[17] And in talking about his books, she said, "he had the greatest difficulty in writing."[18]

Wilfred Barlow, who joined the training course in 1939, writes:

> Alexander's prose-style did not come easily to him, and many of us sat at his side whilst he attempted to get more and more information into sentences which became longer and longer, more and more ponderous.[19]

16. Walter Carrington, foreword to *The Universal Constant in Living*, by F. Matthias Alexander (London: Mouritz, 2000), xiii–xiv.
17. Marjory Barlow, *An Examined Life* (Berkeley: Mornum Time Press, 2002), 202.
18. Marjory Barlow, "Recollections of My Uncle F.M. Alexander" (opening ceremony talk for the 4th International Alexander Congress, Sydney, Australia, July 17–23, 1994).
19. Wilfred Barlow, introduction to the 1985 edition of *The Use of the Self*, by F.M. Alexander (London: Orion Books, 2001), 3.

When in 1946 Alexander was asked by an Australian enquirer who wished to learn by correspondence, Alexander advised:

> Read *The Use of the Self*, "Evolution of a Technique," and in *Universal Constant in Living* the chapter on Change, "Constant Influence of Manner of Use in Relation to Change."[20]

In 1946, Alexander added a new chapter to *The Universal Constant in Living*, "Knowing How to Stop."[21] In the new preface, Alexander concludes:

> The fact to be faced is that the human self was robbed of much of its inheritance when the separation implied by the conception of the organism as "spirit," "mind" and "body" was accepted as a working principle, for it left unbridged the gap between the "subconscious" and the conscious. This gap still remains unbridged by the studies, scientific or otherwise, which have been stimulated by the conception of separation. I venture to assert that if the gap is to be bridged so that the self may enter into and enjoy the fuller benefits of "man's supreme inheritance," it will be by means of a knowledge, gained through practical experience, which will enable man *to inhibit his instinctive, "subconscious" reaction to a given stimulus, and to hold it inhibited while initiating a conscious direction, guidance, and control of the use of himself that was previously unfamiliar.*
>
> The crux of the matter is that change demands the use of procedures which are unfamiliar, and in my long experience I have never met a person who, in attempting to carry out a decision to make a given change, was sufficiently endowed with the ability—which the mystics choose to call "detachment"—to keep to that decision, however well-considered, if the procedures decided upon as necessary to make the change were not in keeping with habitual use. We have heard much of the word "detachment," which has long since been a watchword of the mystics. Hence I here suggest that only those who become capable of translating into practice what is involved in the

20. Source unknown.

21. See footnote 5 on page 137.

> procedure just described can justly claim to have experienced detachment in the basic sense.[22]

Andrew Rugg-Gunn describes the Technique as a moral force: stopping to choose the better and not the worse.

> Alexander's technique is able to restore to the individual man the lost sovereignty of self. The task he sets is not an easy one. Life is a never-ceasing training to do things the right way and not the wrong way. This is the aim of his technique, and as such **it has moral implications.**[23]
>
> …for an act is well done, or right, only by consistent observance of a fundamental principle—that of strict coherence to the right means.
>
> The right "means whereby," therefore, is a "good" in the universal sense, surpassing that of the remote end.…Alexander's formula: take care of the means and the end will take care of itself. Consequently, in the physical sphere, **as in the moral,** the principle of strict coherence to the right means is all important.[24]

Compare with Huxley's quotation from Ovid's *Medea*: *"video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor"*—I see and approve the better course but I follow the worse.[25]

1941: "PREFACE TO NEW EDITION," *THE USE OF THE SELF*

In his preface to the 1941 edition of *The Use of the Self,* Alexander answered letters from readers mentioning the difficulty of teaching themselves "how to do it." He cautions that new sensory experience "cannot be conveyed by the written or spoken word" and they must try new means that "feel wrong." He concludes:

> To anyone who accepts these points and sees the reason for keeping them in view whilst working to principle in employing the technique,

22. Alexander, *The Universal Constant in Living,* xxvii–xxix.

23. Andrew Rugg-Gunn, "Background to Disease," in *Mature Consideration of the Work of F.M. Alexander,* ed. Alexander Murray, booklet (Alexander Technique Center Urbana, 2002), 31.

24. Rugg-Gunn, "The Philosophy of a Technique," in *Mature Consideration*, 33.

25. Ovid was a Roman poet (43 B.C. – 17 or 18 A.D.). He wrote a lost tragedy about the Greek mythological female figure Medea.

I would say, "Go ahead, but remember that time is of the essence of the contract."[26]

1942: DIARIES OF FRANK AND GRACE HAND

"The Diaries of Frank and Grace Hand" as published in *The Philosopher's Stone* are an extensive account by a mother and son of a series of lessons in New York City, April through September. Frank Hand's lessons were usually nearly an hour in length. These diaries contain a wealth of information.

Frank Hand's Diary:
Sunday, April 26, 1942, 12:30 PM

When I walked into Mr. Alexander's room the first thing he did was to ask me to sit down. I did so. Then he asked me to get up and sit again. He then explained that I was not using the lifter muscles in my back. These muscles, he explained, are the only ones which medical men say do not tire. He explained the proper way to sit.

He placed one hand on top of my head and the other one under my chin. I was then not to push my knees out but to let them go forward and he would let me down in the chair. He did so, I did not do it properly, I went too fast. He said the chair should support me and I should not slump. He then told me to place my feet slightly further apart than usual and he took hold of my head and let me down. Then as I sat in the proper position, he would continue to fix my head which seemed to get out of position, he also would place his hand behind my back and push up and in.

The proper position is to have both feet flat on the floor, your hands open, face up on your legs, away from your knees and nearer your body. The head should be forward and up but when he would fix it, it seems as though he pushed it back rather than forward.

To get up he took my head and told me to let my knees go away slightly and push up with the head.

He then sat beside me to show the proper manner of breathing. It is improper to blow out or suck in air. Our lungs are similar to a balloon in a vacuum and it is only necessary to place our body in such

26. F.M. Alexander, *The Use of the Self* (London: Orion, 2001), 20.

a position as will enable the normal atmospheric pressure to work. If we sit or stand properly the air will force its own way into our lungs. Then by the contraction of the ribs the air is forced out. This process is repeated for proper breathing. The lungs are in the back so it is improper to force out your chest. To do so is to strain the heart which is in the front of your lungs and will also cause TB in the upper portion of the lung.

I continued to sit in the proper position for at least one-half hour. I noticed the strain on my stomach muscles which was soon shut out by a more severe strain in the upper leg especially in the big front muscle near the body. This strain left as soon as I stood and walked a few steps. During the lesson I became rather tired, which shows considerable but imperceptible strain on other parts of my body.

Alexander talks continually throughout the lesson, telling incidents in his life and little stories about others. He said he had a terrible temper when a child. His father was very stern and apparently thrashed him quite often. He was continually being thrashed for committing the same or similar acts, and each time he said that he did not intend to do it but did it notwithstanding an urge not to do it. This is one reason leading to his present refusal to blame any one for any thing.

He states that his teaching is to explain and show "what not to do," it is not a mere cure. He believes the Americans are too much interested in doing something *now* and that they do not have the philosophy of the Chinese to whom time seems to mean nothing. A quality which, says Alexander, is an important element of their (Chinese) ability to hold back the Japs [*sic*], with so few weapons. He also says that when man built the chair he did much to throw himself out of gear, and showed me how the natives sit—and which is how man used to sit—on his haunches so to speak. He is evidently very agile because I could not sit that way. The knees are very far apart and the lower and upper leg make a right angle. In other words the upper leg is practically parallel to the floor and the two upper legs are almost in a straight line.

One of his pupils is a great golf writer of England who told him that his was a great teaching because the pupil could not have an incorrect

> experience. Whereas the pupil of the ordinary golf professional has as many or more incorrect experiences as correct ones. Alexander says: "Now when I tell you to do something, don't do it," and then he takes his hands and guides them in the proper manner. In other words it is necessary for him to re-educate in order to teach or teach in order to re-educate. We cannot trust our normal sensory perceptions because they have become a product of our bad habit which we are attempting to correct.[27]

1945: "PREFACE TO NEW EDITION," *MAN'S SUPREME INHERITANCE*

When *Man's Supreme Inheritance* was reissued, Alexander offered a new preface in which he highlights the significant points from the 1918 edition.

> Here, then, are some of the important problems relating to the control of human behavior to which the reader can find solutions in this book:
>
> 1. Why living in a quickly changing environment has been a stumbling-block in the way of man's development and progress.
> 2. Why physical culture and present educational methods are based upon a wrong principle.
> 3. Why the education of the "whole child" is not possible under educational methods based upon the present principle.
> 4. Why relaxation exercises do more harm than good.
> 5. Why man can no longer depend on his feelings alone as a compass to guide him on the sea of life.
> 6. Why, in any attempt to make necessary changes in himself, man would need to do what *feels wrong* in order to *be right*.
> 7. Why the habit of *end-gaining* is probably the most persistent and impeding habit he needs to overcome in seeking to make changes in himself or others.

27. Frank Hand, "The Diaries of Frank and Grace Hand," in *The Philosopher's Stone*, 36–38.

8. Why the method of *direct approach* to a problem of change in behavior so constantly fails to bring about the desired end, and why the *means whereby* to an end should depend on an indirect procedure.
9. Why man fails so often to put his good ideas into practice, especially when he tries hardest to do so.
10. Why so many apparently *good* results of following certain methods prove in the long run to be *bad* results, and why so-called cures turn out to be merely palliative.
11. Why it can be stated that the theory and practice set down in this book are based upon *a new principle*, and so provide a new and reliable basis for the diagnosis of human behavior.
12. Why, **last but most important of all, the use of the *inhibitory processes*** is the necessary first step in the reconditioning of human behavior.[28]

"Systematized common sense" was the phrase once used by a reviewer in summing up this book.

1946: PEGGY WILLIAMS

From Peggy Williams's foreword to *Explaining the Alexander Technique* (1992):

> I initially encountered the Alexander Technique when my first husband, who suffered from a severe stammer, made a study of Alexander's books in our local library and decided to go for lessons to see if the Technique could help his condition. In fact, it helped him enormously. He then suggested that I too should go for lessons. I must confess the idea did not really appeal but I thought I ought to give it a try. At that time I was suffering from a chronic back problem but I did not associate this with misuse—I just saw it as part of life and something I had to endure.

28. F. Matthias Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance: Conscious Guidance and Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* (London: Mouritz, 1996), xii–xiii.

I cannot remember very much about my first lesson with F.M. Alexander in May 1946, except that I was so nervous and conscious that I should be on my best behavior that I stood to attention in front of the chair and made myself completely rigid. Alexander then said, "Pupils who interfere as much as you do make it very difficult for my assistant teachers to do this work!" I also recall that at some stage in the lesson he put a hand on the front of my neck and it was as if his hand were actually inside my throat facilitating a very powerful release of the musculature. I knew then the Technique could also help me and that I must pursue it.

However, we were quite poor at the time and unable to afford the three guineas a lesson Alexander charged. So I went to a variety of his assistant teachers. In one of these, Max, his nephew, had to leave early and Alexander came in and took over the lesson. I asked him what I could do to help myself when I wasn't having lessons, to which he replied, "Stop pulling your head back, my dear!" Although my back problem had disappeared I considered I needed more intensive work and so I took the opportunity to ask Alexander whether I could join the training course and he said, "Yes, that could be arranged." The necessary preparations were made and I started the training in September 1946.

There were some twenty people on the course and, because of the large number, we were divided into a morning and an afternoon group. Alexander would come in and give everyone a turn. If you were going well it would be a short turn, but if you needed more help he would take as long as necessary. At first I found the training an ordeal—F.M. was always saying I was trying too hard—until one afternoon, when I was in my second year, I returned from the training course and decided to give up "trying." The next day Alexander was able to move me in and out of the chair as if I were floating. He said, "There! Now you've really got it, my dear!" Of course, I still had plenty to learn but I had learned not to interfere. I had understood the principle of inhibition.

Alexander's hands were quite incredible—they were so knowing, perceptive and sensitive. Some students thought they almost had a life

> of their own. Yet, at the same time, F.M. would often tap his head with his forefinger and say, "You know this is where it comes from!" He also used to tell us, "If you want to know more, read my books." I took this piece of advice seriously but, to be honest, on first reading I could not make much sense of them. However, as I changed I did begin to understand more. In particular, reading *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* helped me to understand the relevance and significance of the hands on the back of a chair procedure which had previously seemed utterly meaningless. I informed Alexander about my "discovery" and he smiled and said, "That's right, little lady," patted me on the shoulder and encouraged me to continue with my studies. I did and I continued to derive insight and understanding. And I still do! For this reason I think it is a great pity that so many young teachers have never read Alexander's four books.[29]

1947: DIARY OF EVA WEBB

Eva Webb wrote of her first lesson with Alexander on June 21, 1947. She had thirty-two more lessons with Irene Stewart, Pat MacDonald, Max Alexander, Walter Carrington, and Dick Walker. This lesson with Alexander was just prior to his stroke.

> He worked so fast. I don't really know what happened. Bits from the books sprang out at me and I recognized them, but of those hands I had no previous knowledge. I wasn't supposed to notice them much (!) just give the "directions" and nothing else. Really nothing. But so many things *would* intrude in addition to the habits which I knew would compete for entry. That interesting and pleasant room—F.M.A.'s person up as far as his bow tie, all seeming to belong to a young man—a hasty glance higher when I dared!—and Irene Stewart sitting behind to my right, no doubt in order to discover the worst.[30] So

29. Peggy Williams, foreword to *Explaining the Alexander Technique: The Writings of F. Matthias Alexander,* by Walter Carrington and Seán Carey (London: The Sheildrake Press, 1992), viii–ix.

30. Compare Eva Webb's description of Alexander with the character of Miller in Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1995).

> when those easy-difficult inhibitions were asked of me I made the sort of mess which I suppose was no worse than most people make. That was nothing to be complacent about. Oh dear no! There was a certain urgency in Mr. A.'s tone which surprised me a bit. Although he had so often written that people are unable to inhibit, he was very nearly scolding me. Not that I minded. Could have enjoyed a real scolding so long as I knew why it was supposed to help. I understood presently that in this short time he had set himself to prevent wrong experiences which would hamper me if they once occurred. How much, if anything, he prevented I couldn't say. It is annoying to be unable to appreciate him fully.
>
> He talked about muscular effort and allowed me to feel his unmuscular arm. **I was supposed to go on my toes while leaning slightly back for his support.** A funny business, but when at last I did, the "lift" was grand.
>
> He eventually induced the psycho-physical me to hang together like one of my string puppets when he took me up out of a chair. Sometimes I dragged and sometimes I was lighter. I don't think it was all failure.
>
> I was advised to do without my glasses when convenient to give my eyes a chance of improving. "I should give her plenty of time on the table, Rene," he said.[31]

Taking students "on their toes" was not a new procedure. In *An Examined Life,* Marjory Barlow describes Alexander's use of this procedure with his sister, Amy, who had badly damaged her hip in 1895, while Alexander was touring New Zealand. Amy had fallen from a horse and was dragged with a foot in the stirrup for a half-mile. The doctors told her she would always walk with a limp. Alexander returned to Melbourne and took her on her toes with her hands on the mantelpiece, daily, for hours at a time (until she could have screamed), but she never limped. Amy Alexander Mechin was Marjory Barlow's mother.[32]

31. Eva Webb, "Diary of My Lessons in the Alexander Technique," in *The Philosopher's Stone*, 17–18.

32. Marjory Barlow, *An Examined Life* (San Francisco: Mornum Time Press, 2002), 24.

1949–1950: FILM OF ALEXANDER

There are two short films of Alexander, 1949 and 1950 at Ashley Place. Fred Watts's daughter Marion, who as a child was a pupil in the little school, did the filming.[33] One film was an experiment and Alexander works on Margaret Goldie who arrived unexpectedly. In the second film, Alexander works on a pupil of Carrington's whom Alexander had never met. It's worth noting that Alexander's stroke was only two years prior. The film also contains a frame of Alexander standing with John Skinner, Walter Carrington, and Fred Watts.

1953: *THE EXPANDING SELF* BY GODDARD BINKLEY

In the second part of his book *The Expanding Self* (1993), Goddard Binkley offers his diary of seventy lessons with Alexander, from 1951 to 1953. In *The Alexander Journal,* number 14, 1995, Anthony Spawforth, as a "fellow student" wrote a review. Here are excerpts from Spawforth's review:

> As Walter Carrington says in his foreword: "Goddard had a true Boswellian gift; just as he brought Dr. Johnson to life…Goddard has performed a similar miracle here. Those of us who knew Alexander, and who were taught and trained by him, can vouch for the portrait that Goddard paints. We can hear the familiar inflections of his voice and his whole manner of expression in the words that are reported." Although my time with Alexander was comparatively short, I can entirely echo these comments.
>
> …Throughout the diary Goddard has thoughtfully inserted quotations from Alexander's four books to underline and explain the many difficulties he had during his lessons. He was not a "silent" pupil. Alexander encouraged him to ask questions. Goddard had a very wide back and Alexander soon mentions his envy of it.
>
> > "You have such a beautiful back, I wish I had it, and it's a great shame if you don't use it.…When you do misuse yourself, you do it twice as badly as the next fellow!"

33. Fred Watts was friend and pupil, the chairman of the Rationalist Press Association and of Chatersons Limited, publishers of Alexander's books.

What comes across so strongly in the diary is Alexander's liveliness and energy (he was 82 when Goddard started his lessons). In one lesson, Goddard asks Alexander "When you tell me to let my head go forward and up and out of your hands, should my response be *not to do anything*?" Alexander replies, "That's right. You only allow your head to go forward and up and it will go up, I'll give you a written guarantee of that." Alexander answers this question affirmatively and emphatically. However, it often happens that the pupil in complying with the order not to do anything (inhibitory act) forgets to attend to the all-important matter of directing his use. In a footnote on page 13 of *The Use of the Self* [page 35 of Orion edition] Alexander says:

> When I employ the words "direction" and "directed" with "use" in such phrases as "direction of my use" and "I directed the use," etc., I wish to indicate the process involved in projecting messages from the brain to the mechanisms and **in conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms.**

Alexander in this particular lesson goes on to say to Goddard "I will give you a right experience; it's impossible for me to give you a wrong experience. Think of what that means." Comparing this approach with that of the usual trial and error method of learning with a teacher.

There are so many of Alexander's comments to Goddard that are quotable but there is one that is of particular importance to me: "Six or seven places in my books I have made a remark which no one ever seems to remember, and that is that *ends come of themselves,* they cannot help but come of themselves." I suppose this is another way of saying, as he increasingly did towards the end of his life, that "the right thing does itself," always provided that the old habitual response is inhibited and the new means whereby are truly understood, wished for and energized.[34]

34. Anthony Spawforth, review of *The Expanding Self,* by Goddard Binkley, *The Alexander Journal* No. 14, (Autumn 1995): 42–43.

1954: *INSIDE YOURSELF* BY LOUISE MORGAN

After Alexander had recovered from his stroke, Walter Carrington described his teaching as better than ever. Alexander achieved more with less effort. Louise Morgan's book *Inside Yourself* includes a diary of "Miss G.R." (most likely G.R. Buchanan), who had thirty-two lessons during the last year of Alexander's life.

> The story she told me was the tragic one of failure to recover properly from a serious disease, and gradual lapse into invalidism. She had seen specialist after specialist,…only to grow slowly but steadily worse.… one day by the chance of a door being left ajar, she heard her name spoken and one consultant say to another, "Poor soul! You agree with me, there isn't a hope."[35]

Morgan persuaded her to see Alexander. G.R.'s first lesson:

> "And now let's get down to work," he said, taking up his position beside her and putting his hands on her head.
>
> With deft and expert touches of hand and fingers he explored her head and neck muscles, turning the head slightly from side to side, feeling the various parts of the head and neck as if he were, so to speak, dissecting the living muscles and fibres.
>
> After working in this way for nearly half an hour, he asked her: "Are you tired?"
>
> "Too interested to be tired," she replied.
>
> A minute later he said quietly, with his hands at the base of her head, "I want you to stand up."
>
> "Stand up?" she echoed in a stupefied voice. "I haven't stood up for years."
>
> "Never mind. It will be quite all right. When I say stand up, just stand up. That's all."
>
> Almost immediately he repeated: "Stand up!" And she rose easily, and there she stood on her two feet, beaming with delight and nearly in tears with the shock of happy surprise.

35. Louise Morgan, *Inside Yourself: A New Way to Health Based on the Alexander Technique* (London: Mouritz, 2010), 6–7.

> When she got her breath, she gasped, "It's a miracle."
>
> "Nature is full of miracles," he commented dryly.
>
> She wanted to know what he meant, and he explained. This was not a miracle, but the natural result of his bringing about with his hands a more integrated use of herself. So long as he did this, she would always be able to stand up and even to walk. The head was meant to be carried forward and up to control the body muscles, but she, like so many other people, pulled the head back and down.[36]

This may be the last account of a lesson with F.M. Alexander.

1965: MARJORY BARLOW, MEMORIAL LECTURE

In her Alexander Memorial Lecture of November 9, 1965, "The Teaching of F. Matthias Alexander," Marjory Barlow expresses:

> Alexander's books are obligatory reading for anyone who takes his teaching seriously.
>
> Before the war I had a pupil who was home on leave from army service in India. He had a course of lessons and went back to his unit. Two or more years later he returned to London for a refresher course of lessons. I congratulated him on the change in himself which he had brought about. "Yes," he said, "I have been working hard. One thing that has helped me more than anything else. **I keep Alexander's books on my bedside table and read a chapter every night**."
>
> The following day I told Alexander this story while we were having a training class. He was silent for a long moment and then said thoughtfully, "**Yes, and I would be a better man if I did the same**."
>
> …The teacher's responsibility for the continued existence of the work is heavy, especially if he trains other teachers, to ensure that none of the essential elements of the teaching are lost.
>
> In the second aspect—the application of the work to deeper spheres of our experience, the division into teacher and pupil vanishes.
>
> There is no end to work on oneself—here we are all in the same boat.

36. Ibid, 8–9.

When Alexander was nearly 80 years old he said to me, "**I never stop working on myself—I dare not**." He knew that the only limits to this kind of development are those which we impose on ourselves.

He continued to teach to within five days of the end, at the age of 86, and then, having refused all drugs which might deprive him of it, he achieved the rare distinction of being present at his own death.

Tonight we have remembered him—but the memorial that would please *him* best is that we should do his work.[37]

37. Marjory Barlow, "The Teaching of F. Matthias Alexander," (annual F.M. Alexander Memorial Lecture at The Medical Society of London, November 9, 1965).

CHAPTER VIII

Frank Pierce Jones

Freedom to Change was a reluctant summary of Frank Pierce Jones's life and work with the Alexander Technique. Reluctant, in that when such a book was proposed to him, Frank was doubtful of its interest or value. He required the encouragement of my wife Joan and me, and an enthusiastic response to the first few chapters by our friend Peggy Williams, visiting us at the time, to stimulate him to continue and finish it.

Little did we know that he did not have long to live, and died before he had the opportunity of seeing its completion.

Always reticent in mentioning anything which seemed self-promoting (he was supportive of some of our "end-gaining" activities on behalf of the Alexander Technique, and wondered whether he too should have indulged a little more in such activities), Frank didn't mention two very interesting, to me, facts about his career as a teacher. In *Freedom to Change,* he talks of visiting John Dewey, without mentioning that he gave Dewey lessons in his later years, nor did he mention that he was giving lessons to Aldous Huxley at the time Huxley was writing *Island* with its obvious connection to the Technique.

Reading Huxley's *Ends and Means* was the starting point for Frank's long Alexander journey. Huxley was a thinker we both respected and admired. I was given *Crome Yellow* when in an isolation ward in a Johannesburg hospital in 1945, and by the time I met Frank in 1963 had read every novel, most of Huxley's short stories, two of his three travel books, and *The Perennial Philosophy* which steered me into a year-long study of Sanskrit. Rereading *Ends and Means* some sixty years later, I am astonished at its wisdom and direct application to life today.

When we moved to Michigan State University in 1967, we invited Frank to give a paper on the Technique. The result was "The Organization of Awareness" which I have read and reread many times since. The most recent rediscovery of its essential nature came after studying a Teaching Company

course on perception, in which the lecturer mentioned his Princeton mentor, J.J. Gibson. I remembered Frank's inclusion of Gibson's (then) new *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* which I had never seen.

Studying Gibson made me aware of the extent of Frank's research and widely-read conclusions on the scientific potential of the Alexander Technique. Another footnote to his talk was William James on attention. Although an admirer and avid reader of James (and his brother Henry), the importance of Frank's reference had escaped me.

A careful study of *Freedom to Change* and many of the references contained led me to the fact that Frank's Alexander "aha" experience was not with F.M., but with his brother A.R. Here is Frank's description of that introductory lesson:

> My first experience of making a habitual movement without habitual effort seems as vivid to me now as it was when A.R. Alexander demonstrated the Technique to me in 1938. Perhaps it was the element of surprise that made the experience so memorable. I had expected something quite different—to have my faults of breathing and voice production diagnosed and to be given a set of exercises to correct them. Instead, Alexander chose the movement from sitting to standing for his demonstration. He made a few slight changes in the way I was sitting (they seemed quite arbitrary to me and I could not remember afterward what they were), then, asking me to leave my head as it was, he initiated the upward movement without further instruction.
>
> **Before I had a chance to organize my habitual response, the movement was completed and I found myself standing in a position that felt strangely comfortable**. I was fully conscious throughout the movement, and it was a consciousness, not of being moved by someone else—Alexander appeared to be making no effort whatever—but by a set of reflexes whose operation I knew nothing about.[1]

It seems only fair to include A.R.'s contribution to the evolution of the Alexander Technique. On a personal note, A.R.'s talent was brought home to

1. Frank Pierce Jones, *Freedom to Change: The Development and Science of The Alexander Technique* (London: Mouritz, 1997), 7. On page 65, note that two years later in September 1940, Frank recollects his first lesson with F.M., "Nothing spectacular happened in the lesson (as it had in my first lesson with A.R.), but my awareness must have been heightened."

me by a publication of a film of A.R., lounging in a deck-chair, holding out his walking stick for his two German Shepherds to leap over at his request. As a former owner of large dogs (Dobermans) who had failed after serious attempts to train them in the simplest of obedience (coming when called, sitting to order), I could not but admire the performance.

When I thought about A.R.'s condition since his fall in 1918, and realized that in all probability he had lost the connection between his back and legs at the lumbar plexus, my admiration knew no bounds. Walter, aided by Joan for many years, had worked with a young girl, a thalidomide baby, who was a spina-bifida sufferer, with a healthy back only as far as the twelfth thoracic nerve. Her legs never grew apace, and she owed her mobility to her ability to think up and support herself with her arms.

A.R.'s odd walk, using a stick not as a support, only to balance, described by Frank and others, was possible because his legs had grown normally and were functional until his accident. The fact that he taught seated next to the pupil was not unusual for him in 1917, as the demonstration in the brief film of F.M. teaching while standing would not have been possible for A.R. Another recommendation of A.R.'s teaching is epitomized in Dewey's *Experience and Education,* which was written in 1938 when he was having regular lessons with A.R. After a preliminary definition of the terms, Dewey's "The crucial educational problem is procuring the postponement of immediate action upon desire until observation and judgment have intervened" is a succinct summary of what I believe to be the purpose of the work.[2]

Dewey was instrumental in encouraging Frank to pursue scientific study of the Technique. As Richard Brown describes:

> Frank Pierce Jones began his research program with the encouragement of colleagues like John Dewey, Grayson McCouch, Harold Schlosberg, and J. McVicker Hunt. These eminent scientists were convinced that Alexander had made an important discovery but were frustrated by their inability to formulate the Alexander Technique in a scientifically meaningful fashion. Frank Jones was able to answer this calling by first of all defining the poise of the head and secondly

2. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1972), 69.

describing the quality of movement in ways which were precise, objective, and measurable.[3]

In *Freedom to Change*, Frank offers up three hypotheses based on his research.

> **The evidence that I have assembled has been drawn from the careful observation of changes that have taken place in myself and others and a search for mechanisms that would account for them. I believe the evidence fully supports the following hypotheses**:
>
> 1. **The reflex response of the organism to gravity is a fundamental feedback mechanism which integrates other reflex systems.**
> 2. **Under civilized conditions this mechanism is commonly interfered with by habitual, learned responses which disturb the tonic relation between head, neck and trunk.**
> 3. **When this interference is perceived kinaesthetically, it can be inhibited. By this means the anti-gravity response is facilitated and its integrative effect on the organism is restored.**
>
> **I submit that these hypotheses have face validity and are consistent with established principles of physiology and psychology**.[4]

Frank's experience as both teacher and scientist led him to the conclusion that Alexander teachers would be wise to underplay the technique's impact on health and posture. He felt that such case studies could be found in relation to almost any method or exercise program, and did little to establish the credibility of the Technique. He instead stressed its educational impact on movement and thinking, an impact that he worked to measure in the laboratory.[5]

It is therefore not surprising that Frank's reaction to Nikolaas Tinbergen's 1973 Nobel Prize acceptance was less enthusiastic than other Alexander

3. Richard A. Brown, "The Research Contributions of Frank Pierce Jones" (paper presented at the First International Congress of Teachers of the F.M. Alexander Technique, Long Island, New York, August 12–13, 1986).

4. Jones, 151.

5. Jones, "Learning How to Learn," in *Freedom to Change,* 187–193.

teachers. Tinbergen, one of the founding figures in ethology, the study of animal behavior, devoted half of his address to the Alexander Technique.[6]

> **It consists in essence of no more than a very gentle, first exploratory, and then corrective manipulation of the entire muscular system**.…
>
> …we can already confirm some of the seemingly fantastic claims made by Alexander and his followers.…Their long list includes first of all what Barlow calls the "rag bag" of rheumatism, including various forms of arthritis, then respiratory troubles, and even potentially lethal asthma; following in their wake, circulation defects…; gastrointestinal disorders of many types; various gynaecological conditions; sexual failures; migraines and depressive states that often lead to suicide; in short, a very wide spectrum of diseases, both somatic and mental, that are not caused by identifiable parasites.[7]

Tinbergen's Nobel speech stimulated Frank's letter to the editor of *Science*. It deserves excerpting here, as the original was lost in the mail.

> There should be a better way of determining the applicability of a new technique than by weighing the opinions of Nobel Prize winners against each other as Maisel has done in his exchange of letters with Tinbergen about the Alexander Technique.[8] It would be difficult for a reader to form an opinion of his own, since in neither of the letters nor in Tinbergen's original address is there an explanation of what the Alexander Technique is or of how it might be applied. Part of the difficulty in following the argument stems from the use of a medical model to discuss what is essentially an educational technique. It is significant that Alexander himself did not at any time claim his technique to be a therapeutic procedure.[9]

6. Nikolaas Tinbergen (1907–1988) was a Dutch biologist and ornithologist who shared the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize in Physiology or Medicine with Karl von Frisch and Konrad Lorenz for their discoveries of the organization and elicitation of individual and social behavior patterns in animals. Tinbergen, as well as members of his family, took lessons in the Alexander Technique with Wilfred Barlow and Elizabeth Walker.
7. Nikolaas Tinbergen, "Ethology and Stress Disease" (lecture in acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine, Stockholm, Sweden, December 12, 1973).
8. Edward Maisel and Nikolaas Tinbergen, "Letters to the Editor," *Science* vol. 188 (May 2, 1975): 404–406.
9. Frank Pierce Jones. *Frank Pierce Jones to Philip H. Abelson, May 20, 1975,* letter, copy from Frank Pierce Jones to Alexander D. Murray.

Frank's letter accompanied his essay, "Head Balance as a Postural Mechanism in Man." It was the last paper he wrote.

> Tinbergen refers to the Alexander Technique as a treatment, describing it as "a mere gentle handling of body muscles." Alexander believed it was a great deal more than that. He believed that in **the relation of the head to the neck and of the head and neck to the rest of the body** he had discovered a basic reflex mechanism (he called it **the primary control**) that integrates posture and movement and indirectly affects the functioning of the whole psychophysical organism. **He taught his pupils** (he did not call them patients) **to recognize and inhibit habitual patterns of tension that interfere with the primary control**.[10]
>
> **In animal movement, Magnus said, the head leads and the body follows**. Line drawings illustrating both sets of reflexes in intact animals can be found in Chapter 10 of Robert's *Neurophysiology of Postural Mechanisms* (1967).[11]

Frank's reference to Tristan D. M. Roberts's reflex illustrations is somewhat ironic, given that Roberts's review of Frank's *Collected Writings on the Alexander Technique*, published in 1998, was dismissive. Towards the end of the review, Roberts suggests that "He even lets us down over what it is that the teacher of the Alexander Technique actually does." Roberts proceeds with his own attempt, the flaws of which should be obvious to any reader who has reached this point in this book![12]

> I can offer a more down-to-earth view of what the Alexander teacher is up to, based on a few personal demonstrations on myself by Walter Carrington, spaced out over a good number of years, together with much discussion.…
>
> **What the Alexander teacher does is, by the very gentle contact of his hands, to suggest to the subject that he adjust his posture slightly and in various places, until the degree of effort noticeably diminishes**. The subject is also encouraged to make himself aware of

10. Frank Pierce Jones, "Head Balance as a Postural Mechanism in Man," in *Collected Writings on the Alexander Technique,* ed. Theodore Dimon and Richard Brown (Cambridge, MA: Alexander Technique Archives, Inc., 1998), 364.

11. Ibid, 371.

12. Tristan D. M. Roberts (1917–2009), professor of physiology at the University of Glasgow and authored books on balance, posture, and locomotion.

> the proprioceptive sensations associated with his adjustments. Such sensations do not normally rise to consciousness but can do so if we pay particular attention. With practice, we can become more and more aware of our proprioceptive sensations and can learn to modify our habitual strategy for supporting our weight until we acquire that lightness and feeling of ease that are therapeutically so valuable. The muscular activity by which we maintain whatever posture we choose to adopt is voluntary rather than reflex. The environmental conditions in which balance has to be maintained change so much and so frequently that a fixed innate motor response to change would not be effective.[13]

Contrast Roberts with Rugg-Gunn's assessment of Alexander's unique genius in "palpation," quoted at length in Chapter III.[14]

The failure of Frank's writings to become more widely read and understood in the U.K. was due to the strong influence of Roberts, a fellow equestrian and professor of physiology, on Carrington and many of his students. Wilfred Barlow, who had used Frank's early experimental results in a paper, without accreditation, was also critical of some of his later work—unfoundedly to my knowledge.

Whatever the ultimate fate of Frank's understanding of the reflex mechanism and the Alexander Technique, it is important to engage with his fuller understanding of the Technique. As Brown noted in his 1986 paper on Jones:

> Many of his writings addressed the much broader question of the relevance of the Alexander Technique to the control of habits. The issue of habit and change was a central theme in the 1965 *Psychological Review* article, but in its broader sense it was a challenging experimental question that he was never able to address directly in his research. The idea that the Alexander Technique was a means of attaining freedom from stereotyped habits was a constant theme in this teaching however. He argues that the same principle of inhibition that freed

13. Tristan D. M. Roberts, review of *Collected Writings on the Alexander Technique,* by Frank Pierce Jones, ed. Theodore Dimon and Richard Brown, *The Alexander Journal*, no. 17, Summer 2001, http://www.mouritz.co.uk. This review is an abbreviated version of Roberts's original lengthier review which appeared on the Mouritz website inclusive of the above quote. Currently, the Mouritz site contains only the abbreviated review.

14. See Chapter III, pages 71–73.

> his experimental subjects from the limitations of their habitual movement patterns, could generalize to free one from the limitations of other stereotyped habit patterns. His goal was thus nothing less than extending the range in which free will could operate in directing one's conduct.[15]

We should remember the legacy of Frank Pierce Jones when seeking the potential scientific verification of our work—already known and valued by all who have had the "experience," regardless of the "objective" corroboration of science. Every serious student of the Technique should be familiar with *Freedom to Change* and *Collected Writings on the Alexander Technique*. In his introduction to *Freedom to Change,* J. McVicker Hunt writes: "The name of Frank Pierce Jones must now rank right along with that of the originator in the establishment of the Alexander Technique." It is a statement I most thoroughly endorse.[16]

15. Brown, 32.

16. J. McVicker Hunt, introduction to *Freedom to Change: The Development and Science of the Alexander Technique*, by Frank Pierce Jones (London: Mouritz, 1997), xiv.

POSTLUDE

The Way of the Flute

I TAUGHT MYSELF TO PLAY THE FIFE when I was eleven years old, had a year of flute lessons in Cape Town, South Africa, when I was twelve, and when I was thirteen, moved to Johannesburg, where I played in the orchestra of the University of the Witwatersrand. When I returned to England in 1946 I was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, successfully passing the Associate of the Royal College of Music at age seventeen in my first term.

I was conscripted at age eighteen into a Royal Air Force Band. I served for over two years, including longer than a year in the Far East. Prior to this, I had a series of disastrous lessons, which destroyed my natural playing ability, produced a nervous breakdown and left me with a stutter.

I then spent two years at the Paris Conservatoire on a French government scholarship. The constant use of the French language, helped by individual instruction in phonetics, cured me of my stutter. In particular, the pronunciation of the consonant "T" in French was very different from the English one, which had been responsible for my speech problem.

My first full-time employment was with the orchestra of the Royal Opera in London with which I played from 1953 to 1955. I then joined the London Symphony Orchestra, remaining there until 1967 when my wife Joan and I moved to the United States. We have been in the United States ever since, except for a three-year period at the Royal Dutch Conservatoire in the Hague.

In 1954 the Paris Opera Ballet spent the summer at Covent Garden and I was privileged to play the Debussy *L'apres-midi d'un faune* with Serge Lifar dancing the faune. This was the first performance of which I have any clear recollection. I was not aware of any breathing difficulty. In retrospect, I imagine that I breathed during the third phrase. This would have entailed sustaining sound for around 20 beats.

My introduction to the Alexander Technique in 1955 was at the recommendation of a scientist friend in whose flat I was then living. I went to

Charles Neil at the Isobel Cripps Centre on Lansdowne Road in the hope of improving my breathing and relieving the stress of dealing daily with new (to me) repertoire. After Charles's death in 1958, my wife and I became students of Walter Carrington, initially at Staflex House, then from 1960 onwards at Charles's former address, 18 Lansdowne Road.

In 1960 as a member of the London Symphony Orchestra I recorded the Debussy with Pierre Monteux conducting. I played the opening solo without a breath until the repeated note (B natural) which ends the phrase. This added 5 more beats to the duration of my breath, making 25 in all.

When preparing for the recording, I practiced each phrase separately (two groups of 7 beats, then a longer phrase of 11) with no breath problem. When I put them together I was watching in the mirror and saw that as I ran out of breath, I shortened and moved forward and down from the hips. I realized this was a bodily movement seemingly unrelated to breathing. I repeated the melody and paid attention to staying back from the hips. I had less of a problem maintaining the sound and the return breath was instantaneous. I searched Chapter I of F.M.'s *The Use of the Self* and found the passage in which he discovered that tendencies he observed when reciting, as opposed to ordinary speaking, became specially marked when he was reciting passages that made unusual demands on his voice. I realized that, in my normal practice, I had never made unusual demands on my breath and that the tendency I had seen was but an exaggeration of my normal process. Prior to that moment of enlightenment, I had always divided my practice into segments making no unusual demands on my breath, based on the non-end-gaining principle of "trial and success." I had developed a facility for inaudible nasal breathing with a rapid return of breath expended in playing. The success of this was apparent when playing a symphony of Beethoven at an annual festival. I discovered a section of the music which had made unusual demands on my breathing during my first year at the festival was taken in stride the second year. I had the experience of seeming to be breathed passively by the return of the air.

Many years later, playing in a community orchestra with a conductor of French origin, I was asked if I would play the whole Debussy solo without taking a breath.

The final phrase, which in my recording I had played after the breath had returned automatically, added another 5 beats to what was about the limit of

my capacity. By a series of long whispered ahs prior to playing, I was able to manage it, but resentfully, as to me it was an inappropriate way to prepare such a delicate, beautiful solo.

A few years later, after reading Steven Shaw's book on swimming emphasizing breathing through the mouth, I realized I had always avoided mouth breathing, except when swimming. I had never examined, in tranquility, how it would happen.

As an experiment, I did a whispered ah, then, at the end, allowed the breath to return, making the same sound ah on the in-breath. I was astonished that more came in than I had exhaled. But the most astonishing event was the movement and expansion of my upper thorax.

I then thought back to my early Alexander Technique lessons. I had been told not to lift the chest. This instruction I had so successfully maintained that I had immobilised my upper ribs and consequently limited thoracic mobility and potential capacity.

I performed the same routine with my flute at the ready and found I could play the Debussy solo with breath to spare. This was a moment of enlightenment. I then remembered that in 1900 F.M. had first described his method as "Full Chest Breathing." I had rediscovered his method. Touring London shortly afterwards in 2001, I visited Walter Carrington with my flute, and demonstrated to him my new discovery.

Since that time, I finish my daily flute practice, now minimal, usually less than an hour, by testing myself to see if I can still easily play the long melody. I am happy to say what did not seem possible when I was 30 years old presents no problem at 82. My breathing history parallels the history of my understanding of Alexander's work. Considering it encouraged me to reinvestigate the earliest stages of Alexander's recorded progress. I had not adequately considered these until quite late in my own life. Perhaps fifty years were necessary to come to the realization of how much he had made available to us.

Blackheath, London
March, 2010

Appendices

APPENDIX I: EXCERPT FROM "HEALTH AND HYGIENE— A REVOLUTIONARY THESIS," *THE ONLOOKER'S* 1910 REVIEW OF *MAN'S SUPREME INHERITANCE*

In many respects Mr. Alexander's brochure (so he calls it himself) *Man's Supreme Inheritance,** is revolutionary…

…it is the first attempt on scientific lines to bring the conflicting methods of physical and psychical therapeutics into harmony, to substitute co-operation for antagonism between the often incompatible claims of physical and mental treatment.

Mr. Alexander has been in practice in London for several years. His treatment has won the endorsement of many medical men of repute. I have at first hand accounts of the remarkable benefit derived from his treatment in most unpromising cases. These considerations would probably not have affected me over much if I had not had the opportunity of studying the theory and the principles on which his treatment is based for myself. In publishing this book, its author has taken a bold step. In accordance with the highest ethics of the medical profession—which many regular practitioners seem fonder of preaching than of practicing—he has given the essentials of his methods to the world in plain intelligible language for him who runs to read. By this action he has absolved his practice of all suspicion of charlatanry.

…Mr. Alexander's theory indicates a system of what I can only describe as psycho-physiological treatment, whereby the conscious intellect or will power may be trained to control the subconscious functions of mind and body. It is, indeed, a big proposition. But the

application of this theory to practice is so fascinating and suggestive that I hope to have an opportunity of referring to it again.[1]

APPENDIX II: EXCERPT FROM AN ABSTRACT, ERIC DAVID MCCORMACK'S 1958 THESIS *FREDERICK MATTHIAS ALEXANDER AND JOHN DEWEY: A NEGLECTED INFLUENCE*

Alexander's technique is built on the physiological premise that the integrated activity and consequent well-being of the psycho-physical organism depends upon the maintaining of a certain functional relationship between the parts of the organism. This relationship, which is his "discovery," he first called the "position of mechanical advantage," and later the "primary control of use." It consists basically in a head-neck-torso coordination which insures correct "use of the self."

Although Alexander maintained that the practice of his technique constitutes a prevention of most or all diseases, he drew conclusions which extend far beyond the physical level. He held that his discovery proved that mind and body were not separate entities, that his method promoted moral progress, and that its universal application, especially to the education of the young, was the prerequisite for the survival of civilization and for further evolutionary progress.

Specific points of his doctrine are that present conditions of civilized life have rendered man's instincts and sensory equipment congenitally unreliable, largely through incorrect postural habits which these conditions have imposed. These rigid habits have not only substituted conflict and tension for coordination in man's actions, but have impaired his judgment at all levels, intellectual and moral as well as sensory. Since the operation of these habits is automatic and "below the plane of consciousness," they cannot be altered by direct voluntary acts. This is because such acts and the judgments from which they issue are framed in the false terms of the very habits which are to be remedied. The only way out of this vicious circle is to inhibit all habitual activity and at the same time set about reinstating the "primary

1. A. B. Olsen, "Health and Hygiene—A Revolutionary Thesis," review of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* by F. Matthias Alexander, *The Onlooker,* October 22, 1910. Also appears as Appendix E in a subsequent edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (London: Mouritz, 1996), 224–226,

control" at the basic, physiological level. One must concentrate not on the end to be gained in executing a given act, but, in Alexander's terminology, on the "means-whereby." Once the "primary control" is established, it becomes the most basic of all habits, the framework within which all other habits are formed, and according to which all acts are performed. It is the fundamental, integrating principle of action and thought, and the ultimate governing factor of all "means-whereby," and of the conscious control of man's actions. The present stage of evolutionary development requires that his actions be brought at least indirectly under conscious control, since instincts which were reliable in former, less complex situations are now no longer adequate, and are even perverted. The "debauched sensory appreciation" of modern civilized man is proof of this.

Dewey encountered F.M. Alexander and his teachings at a moment in his life which was critical both personally and doctrinally. In Alexander's terms, he was badly coordinated physically, and he had undergone a personal crisis in connection with his views on World War I.[2]

APPENDIX III: EXCERPT FROM "WALL EXERCISE," ROBERT D. BEST'S SKIT CIRCA 1973 *BACKWARD AND DOWN: AN ALEXANDRIAN TIME-PHANTASY*

Characters:[3]

Bob: Age, mid-forties; period, mid-1930s.

RDB: Age, mid-eighties; period, mid-1970s.

2. Eric David McCormack, "Abstract," *A Neglected Influence: Frederick Matthias Alexander and John Dewey* (London: Mouritz, 2014), x–xi.

3. Robert D. Best (1892–1984), a successful Birmingham industrialist, came to Alexander after reading Ludovici's *Man: An Indictment*. He became a friend and active supporter, later writing: "the effect on humanity of Mr. Alexander's discovery will eventually be such that history will recognize him as a very great originator, certainly the equal if not the superior of the giants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." Michael Bloch, *The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 138–139.

A Selection from the Play:

Bob: Imagine you are lying on the floor, your head on a book, knees up Mother Brown—Alexander fashion—you feel pressure between the shoulder blades and the "hump," gravity helping to straighten out the curve and "lengthen the spine"—it's pleasant.[4]

RDB: And then you try to reproduce that sensory experience by pressing against, say, a wall while you are standing up.

Bob: Precisely—and when F.M. was staying with us I gave a demonstration in the bedroom. Of course he corrected it and showed how the hump should be coming away from the wall and the hollow of the back going towards it.

RDB: Correct—and by the same token, when you lie on the floor one should be rising against gravity at the hump.

Bob: In other words "Levitation" should take place.

RDB: I agree. It is practical—it's the Thought—the Order.

Bob: Does the thought "Forward and Up" really meet the case? It's all in one axis—Fore and Aft—whereas in my case there was a decided sideways component—a swerve or tilt. We need some supplementary thought—say, "Untwist," combined with the "Forward and Up."

RDB: That's perfectly true. F.M. tended to carry his head on one side. But we are all different yet we all have things in common. Our correspondence on the subject is interesting. He rather slammed us down. In principle, **flexibility of the spine** is what we are after.[5]

4. "Knees Up Mother Brown" was a popular song from the 1930s.

5. Robert D. Best, "Backward and Down." Unpublished skit, copy from Robert Best to Alexander D. Murray.

APPENDIX IV: EXCERPT FROM "DAO AND EXPERIENCE," JOSEPH GRANGE'S 2004 BOOK *JOHN DEWEY, CONFUCIUS AND GLOBAL PHILOSOPHY*

> It is best to begin with experience, which displays four characteristics. It is *aesthetic, interpretive, engaged, and corrective.* If experience is a dao, then there are many modes of behaving on a way. To name a few, one can find a way, seek a way, walk on a way, or even lose one's way. I suggest that the primordial mode of experiencing a way is to feel it. Feeling one's way indicates the intimate connection between the way and the way walker. Feeling is the translation of the Greek word, *aesthesis,* which is the root of the English "aesthetics." To call experience aesthetic is to draw attention to its most rudimentary lived level. One quite literally feels one's way along and uses all one's senses in the process. But central to feeling is touch. We use our fingers and toes, and all the dimensions of our body to feel our way along. It is this basic act of feeling one's way that brings together the American and Chinese understanding of *dao* and experience. The act is not primarily cognitive but still conveys vitally important information. We have succeeded so far but we still have a way to go. There were rough spots but also smooth ones. Sometimes we had to become like children and squeeze through various cracks and fissures. As a dao Experience demands trust, risk, cooperation, and participation.[6]

6. Joseph Grange, *Dewey, Confucius, and Global Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 2004), 86.

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About the Author

Alexander D. Murray's experience of the Alexander Technique began in 1955 with Charles Neil and continued after Neil's death, in 1958, with Walter Carrington. With his wife, Joan Murray, Alex spent nine years working with Walter Carrington, who was F.M. Alexander's principal assistant at the time of his death in 1955. The Murrays worked with and were friends of many other first-generation teachers, including Marjorie Barstow, Dilys Carrington, Frank and Helen Jones, Patrick Macdonald, John Skinner, Peter Scott, Tony Spawforth, Richard and Elizabeth Walker, Lulie Westfeldt, Kitty Wielopolska, and Peggy Williams.

Alex and Joan met Professor Raymond Dart in 1967. He cooperated in and inspired their ongoing investigation into human developmental movement as it relates to the Alexander Technique. They developed the Dart Procedures, an innovative process that influences Alexander Technique teaching throughout the world. Since 1977, the Murrays have been the co-directors and principal teachers at the Alexander Technique Center Urbana.

Alex was principal flute with the Covent Garden Opera and the London Symphony Orchestra and is the inventor of the Murray Flute. He has taught at the Royal College, Royal Academy, and Royal Northern College in England; the Royal Dutch Conservatory; Michigan State University; and the National Music Camp at the Interlochen Center for the Arts. From 1977 until his retirement in 2002, he was professor of flute at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the recipient of the 2015 Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Flute Association.