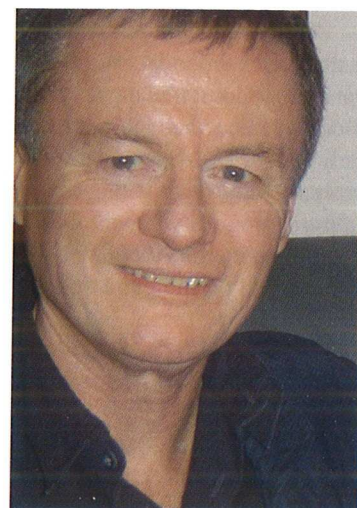


VARIOUS WAYS OF READING 'THE EVOLUTION OF A TECHNIQUE'

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F.M. Alexander's autobiographical Chapter in The Use of the Self is an important part of the education of Alexander Technique teachers. This paper suggests that 'The Evolution of a Technique' may be interpreted in a variety of ways for learning purposes. It touches on some of the difficulties students mention as they read Alexander's texts.

The 'Evolution of a Technique'¹ is the chapter in F.M. Alexander's canon that tends to receive most attention. This chapter is held in high regard within the Alexander Technique profession because it purports to describe autobiographically how Alexander worked out the principles that later became the essence of his Technique. Alexander Technique teacher trainees are recommended to study this chapter in detail so that they can understand and recreate 'Alexander's story'.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce various ways of reading 'The Evolution of a Technique' other than as a linear autobiography. My intention is to increase its educational relevance by studying it from a range of viewpoints. After a brief discussion of Alexander's writing style, I will look at this chapter through the lenses of metaphor, practical reasoning and narrative analysis.

A brief discussion of Alexander's writing style

Jeroen Staring's doctoral thesis² offers a valuable critique of Alexander in that it sets his work in the context of the many techniques and health fads of his time. One of Staring's stated intentions is to destabilise the hagiographic tendency he detects many Alexander Technique teachers have with Alexander's writings. His agenda is to put these texts into perspective so that readers can see the historical lineage of Alexander's ideas and thereby realise that Alexander might not have been so comprehensively innovative as many of his followers believe.

While I do not believe all of Alexander's followers are as collectively naïve in this regard as Staring would paint them, I agree with him that more critical scholarship regarding the texts is warranted. As American Alexander Technique teacher educator Ron Dennis puts it, "among Alexandrians ... there remains a tendency toward adulation of [Alexander's] person and uncritical acceptance of his thought."³

In the next section I shall draw attention to some of the more common difficulties I've heard in respect of Alexander's writing style.



Some difficulties with Alexander's writing style

When Alexander began writing in the early 20th Century, an author intent on gaining intellectual credibility would have been expected to use established Western literary and rhetorical styles⁴. This could also explain Alexander's combination of long sentences, complex syntax and a somewhat technical manner. A possible exemplar for him in the educational domain would have been Herbert Spencer⁵, whom Alexander cites appreciatively in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*⁶. By contrast, Alexander could also bring a warmer, more engaging attitude to his personal teaching. This can be seen in the transcript of the lecture he gave to physical education students at Bedford in 1934, where we can almost hear him speaking intimately and clearly for his audience of young women.²

Walter Carrington tells us that Alexander took "infinite trouble in his choice of words"⁸. As well, he had professional assistance with some of his writing, including extensive help in the checking of his second book from John Dewey (b. 1859, d. 1952), the American philosopher of education who became Alexander's pupil and friend in 1916 and wrote the introductions to Alexander's first three books.⁹ Dewey's enthusiasm for the work has since provided the Alexander Technique profession with considerable intellectual capital.

Even so, over the years I have heard many Alexander Technique trainees complain that Alexander's literary style makes his writings difficult to understand. Like a number of other teachers and teacher educators¹⁰, I tend to agree. Teacher educator Ted Dimon puts it this way: "As hard as [Alexander] tried to make things clear in his books, he often failed to see that what was obvious to him would not be obvious to us."¹¹

Another explanation for readers' difficulties may be gained from Thomas Kuhn, whose pioneering work established the concept of paradigm transition in science - examples being the Copernican and Darwinian 'revolutions'. During paradigm transitions, writes Kuhn, there will be "a large but never complete overlap" between the problems that can be solved by the old and by the new paradigms¹². In his special form of teaching, Alexander's early work exemplifies such a transitional movement between the normal paradigm of learning, which is premised on the idea of separation of mind and body, and the emerging paradigm of learning based on holism.¹³

As a young man without much formal education, Alexander was a front-runner in explicating this emerging paradigm in his teaching and early writings, not only by extending the vocabulary of older and more familiar ideas but also by generating new concepts linguistically. Kuhn suggests these tasks come more easily to younger people entering a profession — or in Alexander's case, initiating a profession. The price, however, "is often sentences of great length and complexity

[as] many additional research results can be translated from one community's language into the other's."¹⁴

Irene Tasker, who was one of Alexander's earliest apprentices and worked with him on editing his first three books, draws attention to the transitional nature of his complex writing style by quoting a note made by one of her pupils in 1967:

In any assessment of writings such as Alexander's it is important to remember both how slowly new discoveries are assimilated into the main stream of thought, and also how strong a force against their practical application in everyday life is not only the inertia of established habits of thought, but also the positive resistance of those who see themselves or their organisations threatened by new knowledge. So it was with Copernicus and Darwin, so it was with Freud and Jung and Teilhard, and so with Alexander.¹⁵

Alexander himself wrote with insight into the problem of expressing emerging ideas and experiences:

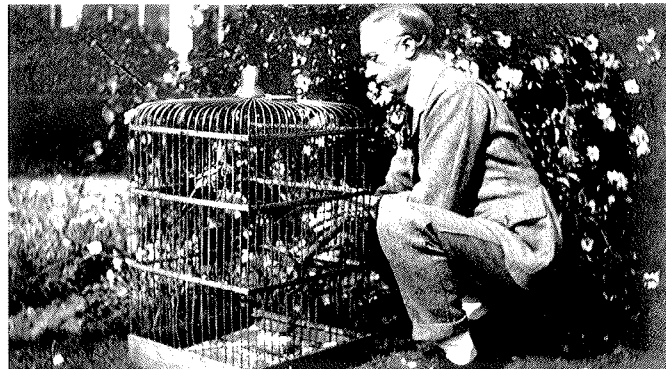
It is comparatively simple to express some idea or experience in a short sentence OR in several short sentences if the idea or experience represents something specific, OR of something that can be done or gained by the direct method, for this involves the concept of separation and disconnectedness. But ideas or experiences concerned with unified phenomena and which involve the indirect method for general, instead of specific, application can only be fully expressed by a sentence that conveys the meaning of such ideas and experiences so that there can be no doubt that the concept on which they are based is that of a co-ordinated indivisible whole¹⁶.

Despite Alexander saying "none of you know how to read"¹⁷ he seems not to have appreciated how his complex writing style might contribute to his readers' misunderstandings of his holistic ideas, with any problems of understanding being inherent in the reader, not the writer. This complaint can be seen in the following passage from *The Universal Constant in Living*:

Another source of misunderstanding has arisen through my choice of words for which I have often been criticised. ... I have always found in my critics a tendency to read into other people's words meanings which fitted in with a particular construction that they were accustomed to put upon them, and I suggest the habit and the misunderstanding are closely connected. ... My conception of the human organism or of the self is thus very simple, but can be made difficult by needless complication resulting from the preconceived ideas which readers bring to it.¹⁸

Fortunately, Alexander later authorised journalist Ron Brown to edit his four books into one succinct volume that Carrington in his introduction says is "a fair and accurate summary of his writings."¹⁹ Others have also published ideas on how to make the books more stimulating to new generations of teachers. Alexander Technique teacher educator and linguist Catherine Ketrick shows us how to break Alexander's complex sentences into linguistically negotiable units and to analyse his books accordingly²⁰. Joe Armstrong recommends compiling a "compendium" of conceptual references from Alexander's writings that would provide a fair basis for assessing "particular aspects of either the concepts or the terms that signify them in the event of a need to restate, reformulate, or dispense with any or all parts of them".²¹

In the next sections, I shall look at some of the more specific issues that have arisen for me



when reading ‘The Evolution of a Technique’, starting with what I call the metaphor problem and its resolution through practical reasoning, and concluding with two narrative analyses. As we look at these sections, it is worth remembering that when Alexander published *The Use of the Self* in 1932 he was aged 63, had been teaching for perhaps forty years and published two earlier books on his work.

The metaphor problem

I shall now examine Alexander’s use of metaphor in ‘The Evolution of a Technique’ and then offer different ways of interpreting the chapter other than literally. References listed are to the third edition (1946) edition of *The Use of the Self*.

Metaphors allow us to draw on our experience of one thing to describe and conceptualise other, sometimes very different, things. For example, philosophers of cognitive science, Lakoff and Johnson²² tell us that a primary Western system of metaphors for mind is ‘The Mind Is A Body’, from which thinking may be mapped as physical functioning such as moving, perceiving, manipulating objects, and eating. They write: “The concept of a mind separate from the body is a metaphorical concept ... The concept of a disembodied mind is also a natural concomitant of the metaphorical distinction between Subject and Self.”²³ Despite the mind being seen as a type of body, these metaphor systems also reflect the Cartesian²⁴ view of the disembodied mind, with non-corporeal reason needing to take control of wayward affectivity and feeling.

Lakoff and Johnson identify a Cartesian metaphor they call Self Control Is Object Control, which is a way of saying The Subject, which is conceptualised as a person, forcibly controls, moves or possesses (uses) the Self as though it were a physical object.²⁵ We see instances of this in the title of the book itself, *The Use of the Self*, and in Dewey’s introduction to it:

In the present state of the world it is evident that the control we have gained of physical energies, heat, light, electricity, etc., without having first secured control of our use of ourselves is a perilous affair. Without control of our use of ourselves, our use of other things is blind; it may lead to anything.²⁶

What tends to have been largely forgotten in the West since Descartes’ time is that mind-body separation is a relatively recent cultural construct. Alexander put it this way in *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*:



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.²⁷

And in 'Body and Mind', Dewey wrote:

F. M. Alexander has pointed out that until we have a procedure in actual practice which demonstrates the continuity of mind and body, we shall increase the disease in the means used to cure it. ... The world seems mad in preoccupation with what is specific, particular and disconnected in medicine, politics, science, industry and education.

We are reminded of happier days when the divorce of knowledge and action, theory and practice, had not been decreed ... In Greece, there was a time when philosophy, science and the arts, medicine included, were much closer together than they have been since. One word described both art and science—*techne*.

There are signs that we are perforce, because of the extension of knowledge on one side and the demands of practice on the other, about to attempt a similar achievement on our own account ... [But] the forces are still powerful that make for diverse education. And the chief of these is, let it be repeated, the separation of mind and body which is incarnated in religion, morals and business as well as science and philosophy. The full realization of the integration of mind and body in action waits upon the reunion of philosophy and science in the supreme art of education.²⁸

Western languages now incorporate Cartesian metaphors so ubiquitously that most of us barely realise we are using them in everyday speaking and writing, let alone in educational discourse generally,²⁹ and Alexander Technique teaching more specifically.³⁰ Australian philosopher Eliza-

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both Grosz illustrates the difficulty of not resorting to dualistic metaphors to describe the relations between mind and body. She uses the imagery of the Möbius strip — a physical model of a three-dimensional figure made of a two-dimensional strip. With mind depicted on one side of the strip and body on the other side, the Möbius strip can be used to represent “the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes the other” (p. xii).³¹ In fact, concepts of inside and outside become irrelevant as they become one.

An example of Alexander’s struggle to reconcile the language of mind and body may be seen in this extract from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*:

The term *psycho-physical* is used ... throughout my works to indicate the impossibility of separating ‘physical’ and ‘mental’ operations in our conception of the working of the human organism ... [T]he two must be considered entirely interdependent, and even more closely knit than is implied by such a phrase. ... I wish, therefore, to make it clear that whenever I use the word ‘mental,’ it is to be understood as representing all processes or manifestations which are generally recognized as not wholly ‘physical,’ and vice versa the word ‘physical’ as representing all processes and manifestations which are generally recognized as not wholly ‘mental’.³²
[italics in original]

Two decades later, in his last book, *The Universal Constant in Living*, Alexander was still saying:

[I]n spite of the frequency with which I have stressed in my previous books the concept of the indissoluble unity of the human organism, some readers still adhere to the concept of separation in interpreting what I have written, as if the procedures of my technique and their results in practice could be labelled separately ‘physical’ or ‘mental’.³³

Even so, in the same book he demonstrates his awareness of this dichotomy problem as a scientific and philosophical one. He quotes from a letter to him from a student, Mrs Alma M. Frank:

Here is the rub: can we get rid of the dichotomy of mind and body through the so-called sciences, when the sciences themselves [e.g. psychology and physiology] are dependent for existence as separate sciences upon that same dichotomy ... inherited from Descartes.... [We need] new principles to be applied in all fields of research, principles which will not only deny the dichotomy of mind and body ... but will free us from continuing our research with the same concepts, labels, and separatistic tools that were born of the dichotomy we wish to be rid of.³⁴

According to Lakoff and Johnson, while we may understand in principle that mind and body are inseparable, it is virtually impossible to describe this inseparability in Western languages without recourse to Cartesian metaphors that inherently contradict the notion of unity of mind and body, of subject and self. For Alexander Technique teachers who may have had no special training in epistemology or cognitive science, this problem also arises when we attempt to describe the philosophical complexities of the Technique without appreciating that our Alexandrian argot contains contradictory Cartesian metaphors.³⁵ I suggest that, despite the care he took to describe this unity, Alexander was no less able to avoid such metaphors in his writings.³⁶

Alexander Technique teacher Mark Arnold alludes to the “Alexander dualism which is central to the way Alexander teachers are obliged to think ... [It] really must be thrown out and a more

coherent understanding established.”³⁷ Arnold recommends the Alexander Technique profession form more appropriate ways of conceptualising what Alexander was attempting to say about body-mind continuity.³⁸ Teacher educator Ron Dennis includes Alexander’s notions of theory and practice in this dualism and suggests that, to the extent the dualism remains unacknowledged by practitioners, it continues to be propagated in contemporary descriptions of the Technique³⁹. I would add that it also tends to anchor the discourses of the Alexander Technique deeper in the normal paradigm of learning.

To illustrate how these dualistic metaphors are present in these discourses, I will now present four examples from ‘The Evolution of a Technique’. In these passages below, while it is possible to recognise the idea of mind-body unity, it is a unity that appears to be brought about by the superior attentive mind (‘reasoning direction’) forcibly making the body (‘feeling’ or ‘instinctive direction associated with ... unsatisfactory habitual use’) unite with it, as after a conflict or battle, and then continuing to dominate it in order to make the desired changes.

It should be noted that Alexander’s noun Use⁴⁰, while also a metaphor of control and containment, is employed here as a synonym for body-mind coordination⁴¹. Teachers of the Technique often talk about a person having ‘good Use’, for example, rather than saying the person moves and behaves in a well-coordinated way, according to the principles of the Alexander Technique. Another complex technical word is Direction, which is sometimes called Ordering. Patrick Macdonald deliberately employs this metaphor to connote command and spatial orientation, as well as “flow of force” within the nervous system⁴². In the extracts shown here the italicised words are metaphors that I will refer to later.

The four passages from ‘The Evolution of a Technique’ are:

There was no question about this. I could see it actually happening in the mirror. This was clear proof ...my instinctive direction *dominated* my reasoning direction”

In trying to employ a conscious, reasoning direction to bring about a new use, I was ... *combating* in myself [that] tendency which causes us all at critical moments to revert to instinctive direction and so to the familiar use of ourselves that feels right

I now saw that if I was ever to succeed in making the changes in use I desired, I must *subject* the processes directing my use to a new experience -- the experience, that is, of being *dominated* by reasoning instead of by feeling.

I was becoming able to *defeat* any influence of that habitual wrong use ...and that my conscious, reasoning direction was at last *dominating* the unreasoning, instinctive direction associated with my unsatisfactory habitual use of myself.⁴³

My italicised words highlight examples of two of the metaphor systems that Lakoff and Johnson distinguish, namely the Social Self metaphor, with the Subject and Self cast as adversaries,⁴⁴ and the Society of Mind and Moral Authority metaphors, in which Reason is cast as the Strict Father whose role it is to rein in bodily inclinations.⁴⁵ Looking at this from a postmodern point of view, the verbs dominate, employ, combat, revert, subject, and defeat convey adversarial, dualistic images of reason subjugating affectivity, of mind militarily colonising body. In other words, mind and body are not united as equals; mind is always superior and controlling.⁴⁶ As I will explain in the next section on practical reasoning, Alexander’s idea of the opposition between reason and habit can be explained in different terms.

Deweyan philosopher Richard Shusterman, himself a Feldenkrais practitioner and a keen

student of Alexander's texts, is critical of the mind controlling body metaphors he sees embedded in the pedagogy of the Alexander Technique. He refers particularly to the verticality of the head above the torso as "the evolutionary metaphor of ascent".⁴⁷ He suggests that Alexander's concept of the Primary Control of keeping the head "forward and up" is

...emblematic of his avid commitment to humanity's continuing evolutionary progress: up from the lowly, impulsive, unthinking animal existence of our origins and forward to ever-increasing transcendence toward perfection through rational inhibition and conscious control.⁴⁸

This critique could be extended to the Alexandrian teaching expression 'the head leads and the body follows', which is commonly used to refer to the physiological primacy of the skull in relation to the rest of the body but could also be a metaphor of reason dominating affect (most Alexandrians accept it as an incontrovertible fact that, when vertical, the head sits on top of the spine and that we go 'up' in response to the force of gravity). Shusterman makes a valid point when he comments: "Alexander often sounds too much like the harsh and haughty voice of a self-centred, dictatorial reason, the negative white male voice of one-sided, willful control. Though this may be the traditional voice of philosophy, can we still take it as the true one?"⁴⁹ From a feminist perspective, the symbolism of (masculine) rationality leading, controlling and rescuing (feminine) affect may also be construed here.⁵⁰

My point in identifying what might be seen as Cartesian oppositions in 'The Evolution of a Technique' is to illustrate how they may increase a reader's confusion about Alexander's concept of psychophysical unity, especially if the chapter is interpreted literally. The reader may also be put off by the form and tone of the language. A more comprehensive understanding of how prevalent and inevitable such metaphorical constructions are in Western languages and, consequently, in Alexander's writings may allow us to read his texts more figuratively and poetically. I believe that being able to distinguish these metaphors and then reconcile them with Alexander's overarching holistic project is an important step towards completing the Technique's transition from the normal to the emerging paradigm of learning.

In the next sections I shall use two different approaches in an attempt to reconcile the Cartesian dichotomy embedded in 'The Evolution of a Technique'. The first will distinguish between two sorts of 'reasoning', namely practical reasoning and intellectual reasoning; and the second will be a narrative analysis that considers symbolism and story telling as possible ways of interpreting Alexander's narrative.

Practical reasoning

Frank Pierce Jones explains the seemingly contradictory dualisms in 'The Evolution of a Technique' by referring to Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*, in which Dewey acknowledged Alexander. Jones quotes Dewey: "The real opposition is not between reason and habit, but between routine, unintelligent habit and intelligent habit or art."⁵¹ While the word 'opposition' might still imply a Cartesian contradiction needing to be resolved, the distinction between 'unintelligent' and 'intelligent' habits is crucial here. 'Intelligence' is one of Dewey's synonyms for practical reasoning, common sense and judgement.

Philosopher Jim Garrison draws on Dewey when he says that "all reasoning is practical [means-ends] reasoning"⁵² and that "Conscious thought and inquiry only occur when established habits fail us. At such times the disruption of habitual action is experienced physically as feeling."⁵³ In other words, while there may be a distinction to make between, for example, intellectual reasoning and practical reasoning, they will both be 'practical' when used as a means to an end

for the modification of habitual patterns. I prefer to think Alexander would have agreed with the following comment from Dewey:

Rationality ... is not a force to evoke against impulse and habit. It is the attainment of a working harmony among diverse desires ... Reason, the rational attitude, is the resulting disposition, not a ready-made antecedent which can be invoked at will and set into movement. The man [sic] who would intelligently cultivate intelligence will widen, not narrow, his life of strong impulses while aiming at their happy coincidence in operation.⁵⁴

In this Deweyan view, Alexander's 'reason' was not setting out to subjugate 'feeling'. Rather, he was trying to distinguish between his less intelligent habitual thinking, which was inept for the specific solution of his vocal problems, and an intelligent and practical approach to solving it through holistic means. Alexander's use of 'reasoning direction' may now be seen as the application of intelligence or practical reasoning, rather than in the Cartesian sense of it being an external, controlling intellect or higher mental function. Alexander Technique teacher Joyce Bird saw it similarly. In her Alexander Memorial Lecture given to STAT in 1973, she tells us how she resolved the problem of 'reason' for herself:

To Alexander, reason was, I think, always God-like. He uses it in his books so often. For a long time, I dodged the word when reading him, because for me it had entirely different connotations. Mine was Blake's Urizen, the Ratio or Bound, a limitation. But this comes from seeing words in the lurid light of abstraction. For I am sure that Alexander meant simply the process of reckoning that every practical man [sic] uses it, in fact — working it out.⁵⁵

Narrative analyses

'The Evolution of a Technique', may be read in a variety of ways. Metaphors notwithstanding, the most obvious way is as an objective and accurate account of how Alexander developed his technique during an important period in his life. However, by approaching Alexander's narrative from a postmodern perspective, with "strategic uncertainty ... to mobilize meaning rather than to fix it",⁵⁶ one may look beyond the tradition that this text is an unproblematic autobiography and develop other educationally useful interpretations of it.⁵⁷

There is reason to be uncertain about the veracity of what may be called Alexander's 'grand narrative'. He wrote it some thirty to forty years after the events he recorded, yet he gives neither dates nor diary notes to support his account. Historiographer Staring⁵⁸ and biographer Bloch⁵⁹ attest that Alexander's version of events is based on fact, but 'the early 1890s' is the closest estimate available of its occurrence, dates being too vague for more precise estimates.⁶⁰

While Staring seems not to question the literal truth of Alexander's narrative, Bloch suggests this chapter may be read in a more sophisticated, heuristic way. He writes:

Possibly [Alexander's] account should be taken symbolically, rather than literally, like the story of the Creation in the Bible ... and it probably represents the best he could do in putting into words a protracted process which he originally grasped in practical rather than intellectual terms...⁶¹

I shall now study this narrative other than literally by analysing it in two ways: first, as a research text, and second, as a form of educational parable.

Alexander's narrative as research text

As mentioned earlier, Dewey wrote the introduction to *The Use of the Self*. By the time Alexander wrote this book he would presumably have become familiar with Dewey's principles of scientific method, which were described in both the first (1910) and second (1933) editions of Dewey's book *How We Think*. These principles vary between the two editions, possibly reflecting Alexander's influence on Dewey in the meantime. In 1910 Dewey articulated the following "five distinct steps in reflection":

1. a felt difficulty;
2. its location and definition;
3. suggestion of possible solutions;
4. development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion;
5. further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection.⁶²

By 1933, long after Dewey had become Alexander's pupil, these five steps had become "five phases, or aspects, of reflective thought" which take a "perplexed, troubled, or confused situation at the beginning to a cleared-up, unified, resolved situation at the close." These five phases are:

1. *suggestions*, in which the mind leaps forward to a possible solution;
 2. an intellectualization of the difficulty or perplexity that has been *felt* (directly experienced) into a *problem* to be solved, a question for which the answer must be sought;
 3. the use of one suggestion after another as a leading idea, or *hypothesis*, to initiate and guide observation and other operations in collection of factual material;
 4. the mental elaboration of the idea of supposition as an idea or supposition (*reasoning*, in the sense in which reasoning is a part, not the whole, of inference);
 5. testing the hypothesis by overt or imaginary action.⁶³
- [italics in original]

Alexander's narrative in the 'Evolution of a Technique' parallels Dewey's method and may be read as a methodological template for research on one's self. In his PhD dissertation, Eric McCormack tells us that Dewey endorsed this chapter because it met his five-step scientific method,⁶⁴ and Bloch comments on the possibility of Alexander writing it in a 'scientific' way in order to attract Dewey's endorsement⁶⁵. I would speculate that Dewey, an esteemed university professor, might have recommended Alexander write 'The Evolution of a Technique' in the form of a research methodology chapter, such as would appear in a thesis or dissertation. If so, this chapter need not be seen as a literal account of Alexander's actual journey so much as a version of it that is replicable by later researchers and students. Combined then with the theoretical outline of his Technique given in the earlier books, the third book effectively completed Alexander's dissertation on his life's work, although his opus would never be examined academically as such.

In any event, Dewey wrote the following in his introduction to *The Use of the Self*:

I appeal to the account which Mr. Alexander has given of the origin of his discovery of the principle of central and conscious control. Those who do not identify science with a parade of technical vocabulary will find in this account the essentials of scientific method in any field of inquiry. They will find a record of long continued, patient, unwearied experimentation and observation in which every inference is extended, tested, corrected by further more searching experiments; they will find a series of

such observations in which the mind is carried from observation of comparatively coarse, gross, superficial connections of causes and effect to those causal conditions which are fundamental and central in the use which we make of ourselves.

Personally, I cannot speak with too much admiration — in the original sense of wonder as well as the sense of respect — of the persistence and thoroughness with which these extremely difficult observations and experiments were carried out.⁶⁶

This high praise from Dewey points to a paradoxical connection between Alexander's 'scientific method' and his metaphorical allusion to feeling and 'instinctive direction' mentioned earlier. In the same breath as he downplays these sensory qualities for being unreliable guides to improving his wrong habitual Use, Alexander also appropriates them for methodological purposes as phenomena that may be used reliably and pragmatically as evidence in his self-research. These opposing views could be reconciled by drawing on practical reasoning. Had Alexander written, for instance, that he appreciated his bodily sensations, including unreliable feelings, because they were important for his gaining wisdom, then his description of his experimentation and observation would be more clearly located in the emerging paradigm of learning.

An educational parable

Another way of reading Alexander's autobiographical chapter is to see it as a teaching allegory, or bildungsroman. Literally meaning a formation story, a bildungsroman is an educational parable of a young person who sets off alone from home to engage in self-discovery by challenging and overcoming the circumstances that confront him/her and then returns home transformed in some way⁶⁷. Well-known examples from the Victorian era are Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and Kipling's *Captains Courageous* (1897).

For Alexander, a more contemporaneous example of such a transformation would have been in the popular post-Victorian novel *Prester John* by Scottish writer John Buchan.⁶⁸ Buchan's protagonist is the fatherless, young, white David Crawford, who travels from Britain and quells a rebellion by the supposedly irrational, restless 'lesser races' of the Transvaal in South Africa. Crawford then provides them with training in technologies to use for rural work under their colonialist controllers. This bildungsroman reading fits with Staring's idea that Alexander's earliest writings have undertones of the 19th and early 20th Centuries' typically British zeitgeist of 'Muscular Christianity' and the 'Empire'.⁶⁹ Kipling described this as the "White Man's Burden".⁷⁰

I find it possible to imagine Alexander living in London in the 1920s and theatrically embroidering his autobiography for educational rather than chronological purposes so that his readers will be inspired to follow suit. In terms of a metaphor mentioned earlier, Alexander may be seen as the hero of his own adventure story, the quintessentially British man of reason who struggled with and eventually mastered irrational feeling, just as other powerful agents colonised and gained dominion over the indigenous populations in the cause of a "Greater Britain".⁷¹ Even if he were unaware of this self-characterisation when he wrote 'The Evolution of a Technique', he acknowledged it fleetingly a decade later with a footnote in his subsequent book, *The Universal Constant in Living*:

As a medical friend wrote to me after reading *The Use of the Self*: "The only criticism that I can offer of your new book is that is just about the most interesting that I have ever read. It beats the usual explorer's yarn into a cocked hat, because you wandered through a much darker country than any of them did."⁷²

Conclusion

These interpretations of 'The Evolution of a Technique' suggest that this chapter, like all good stories, has educational value well beyond that of a linear, historical narrative. With himself as both researcher and protagonist, Alexander was using the scientific and literary conventions of his time to spin a compelling educational yarn about the value of practical reasoning. As well, he was giving an example to his readers and pupils of how they could work on themselves in the way he had done.

While it's clear that Alexander wrote passionately and as best he could about his discoveries, it seems he did not always appreciate how difficult it might be for readers to deal with his complex literary style. With more reflective insight into the craft of writing and of the figurative aspects of his texts, he might have been able to reconcile the unintended dualism of his metaphors and bring more clarity to his formation story. But then again, had he written any differently, how recognisable would his Technique be to us a century later? And how many of us, his followers, would be here today enjoying it?

Endnotes

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