

**THE ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE 1986**  
**THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IN A LARGER CONTEXT**  
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I am going to begin by drawing your attention to the plans shown in Appendices I and II. They outline a schema that we're going to talk about this evening. Appendix I is a map or chart of other things that have been going on during the time that the Alexander Technique has been evolving. We're going to look at this map and see how certain common themes crop up again and again in all these different fields and disciplines. They are the seven themes outlined in Appendix II. Then we're going to see how the Alexander Technique itself relates to these seven themes.

Before we do that, I should mention that I was looking over this outline the other day in preparation for this talk, and I had a moment of doubt and anxiety about it all. I'd just given a lesson to a new pupil, someone who had come along with a back problem and basically just wanted to get rid of the pain. After the lesson, I came out and was looking at the notes for the talk, and suddenly felt anxious at the enormous gulf between this grand scheme outlined here and the, in comparison, quite prosaic process of trying to get across the rudiments of inhibition and direction to someone who just wants to alleviate discomfort. In order to reassure myself, I went back and looked at some of F.M.'s own writing, and I found, in a piece written in 1946, shortly after the end of the war and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the following passage. Referring to his own work, he says, "By these means we are enabled in process to bridge the gulf which has for too long separated subconsciousness and consciousness in the control of reaction, and at the same time to widen the gulf between the human and the animal stages of evolution. (This) could change and improve the basic nature of man's impulsive and instinctive reactions. Man's basic nature has not changed as it should have done during past centuries in respect of conscious direction of his use of himself or in regard to his judgement and control in human relations. Hence on every hand he is faced with the impeding effects of "emotional gusts", prejudice, jealousy, greed, envy, hatred, and the like. These are the outcome of reactions which ruin man's chances of establishing such relations in national and international affairs as could lead to a better understanding of what is essential to the engendering of peace and goodwill in the world." (From *Knowing How to Stop* Chapter 1, by F.M. Alexander (1946).

Well, that's a very big statement indeed, about F.M.'s view of his own work and its relevance to the development of better relationships between individuals in society and between nations at the global level. So, fortified with the knowledge that he himself saw his work in such a large context, I pressed on trying to outline a way in which we can see ourselves in a larger context than that to which we are accustomed in the day-to-day application of our work.

### **Tendency to Isolation**

It seems to me that throughout its development there has been a tendency for the Alexander Technique to be rather isolated from everything else going on around it. Isolated in order, of course, to emphasize its uniqueness, and in that process tending to dissociate itself from anything else with which it might be confused. Especially, dissociating itself from any of those things that are now called fringe, or alternative, or New Age, or esoteric, or some such word.

This is understandable to some extent because, in F.M.'s own lifetime, people were bound to try

to understand what he was doing by likening it to other things. We all know how difficult it is to understand this work, so people constantly attempt to understand it by saying: "Ah yes, I see. It's a form of physio-therapy; a kind of osteopathy; some sort of Western yoga; or it's all to do with positive thinking and mind control." This must have been going on naturally throughout F.M.'s lifetime, and he would equally naturally be insisting on his uniqueness and his difference from any of those things.

Since F.M.'s death, to some extent the same process has carried on. We have constantly had to define ourselves by separating ourselves off from all those things with which we might be confused. Hence F. P. Jones, for example, in his writing, stressed that the Alexander Technique has nothing in common with methods of relaxation, meditation and mind control - even though we are actually always talking of muscular release, awareness and conscious control. Does this have nothing to do with relaxation? meditation? mind control?

Now whilst this emphasis on our uniqueness and our consequent isolation is understandable, it does have certain drawbacks. In particular, it has the drawback of making us feel that we are just a terribly small group. There are about 1,000 people in the world at the moment who claim to teach the Alexander Technique, and that really is a very small band, struggling in a vast world of indifference.

Another drawback is that isolating ourselves so much has caused some teachers to feel the need to build up from the practical elements of the Alexander Technique a whole philosophy of life. They feel that the practical nature of the work needs amplification and needs some broader philosophy to explain and sustain it. And so they take the practical elements and perhaps try to build them up into a grand structure in which inhibition, non-end-gaining, primary control and so on are turned into great philosophical concepts. Now I know that the Technique has been described as a philosophy of life reduced to practical procedures, but if we try to expand it back out from the practical to the philosophical level, it soon begins to look like a large edifice perched precariously on a very small base. Concepts such as non-end-gaining, inhibition, direction and primary control need precise grounding in physical use to be of practical value, but they also need to be seen in a broader context to be of any value philosophically.

### **Bifocal Vision**

So, I think the time has come to see where we do fit in to the larger pattern of things that have been going on in the Western world in this century. I suspect that what we are going to need in the next twenty years or so is a kind of double focus of vision, where we develop more and more the ability to see the broad picture of what we have in common with many other groups of people and disciplines, while retaining also the ability to shift focus down to the precise differences which make us unique. A bifocal vision, like bifocal lenses, in which we can see ourselves as both unique, and also part of a common cause.

### **The Map (Appendix I)**

This map in front of you is a guide or a whistle-stop tour of some of the things I think are important or relevant to us that have been going on during the time the Alexander Technique has been evolving.

You will see that there is no mention of academic science or philosophy on it. Why not? Because the dominant thrust in academic, scientific psychology and academic philosophy has been behaviourist and materialist. I belong to a generation that sat as students in University seminars

while intelligent, adult lecturers were paid to persuade us that consciousness was, physiologically, a trivial accident of evolution, something like feedback in an amplified sound system; or philosophically, an illusion caused by faulty use of language. Since consciousness was regarded by F.M. as Man's Supreme Inheritance, a tradition that has until recently ignored consciousness has not had a lot to say to us except at the detailed level of describing neurophysiological mechanisms.

So, what you have in front of you is a map of some fields that I think are of particular relevance to us, and it is not my aim to explain each of these fields to you tonight. I am assuming that most of you have some acquaintance with some of these things, or if you do not you will know someone who does, and can tell you what to read if you want further knowledge.

My object is to show how, by looking through these different fields, one can extrapolate some common themes, the seven themes on the other sheet of paper, Appendix II, and then relate the Alexander Technique to them. These seven themes seem to me to crop up again and again in different fields. If we use Jung's terminology, we can view them as new elements arising from the collective unconscious of Western culture, little flags popping up and waving, saying, "Come on, it's time you paid attention to me at this point in your collective development." Just as in our own individual lives, certain themes and issues come to the fore at particular times, and if we ignore them we may fail to mature fully, we may become lopsided individuals psychologically, so one can, perhaps figuratively, say that within a whole society or culture, different themes come to the fore and need to be dealt with at different times. And speaking of Jung leads straight into:

### **Depth Psychology**

At the top left of the chart, known as psychoanalysis on the Freudian side and analytical psychology on the Jungian side. In terms of the themes outlined, depth psychology is dealing with the discovery of the unconscious, or subconscious (I think for our purpose the two words can be used interchangeably), and therefore with the discovery of consciousness itself as one end of a spectrum.

Theme 1. It is only when you realize that many of your actions are motivated by hidden factors, factors that you were not at the time aware of, that you begin to realize how fragile and fleeting your consciousness is. You begin to realize that there is a difference between times when you are fully conscious, and times when you are almost entirely driven by subconscious factors. And of course psychoanalysts use dreams, daydreams, intuitions and so on gradually to tease out what is going on behind the scenes, below the level of ordinary consciousness.

So here we have the need both to strengthen our consciousness and to investigate the hidden portions of it.

And this has become essential, because during this century it has become more and more obvious that our ability to control ourselves, our own behaviour, has been increasingly outstripped by our ability to control our environment. You will see on the list of themes that this of course is Theme 2 that we are dealing with. It has become a platitude of our times. A line that is trotted out on all great occasions. F.M. refers to it in the passage I quoted from the essay beginning the little book, *Knowing How to Stop*. Professor John Dewey refers to it in the foreword to *Constructive Conscious Control*. It is usually formulated something like this:

Western science and technology have grown apace and given us tremendous ability to control and change the environment around us and yet there has been no comparable growth in our ability to control our behaviour, our own reactions. This disparity is most graphically shown in how we

deal with such an overwhelmingly powerful force as the nuclear bomb. We are in a situation now where weapons that would destroy the whole globe are now controlled by a small group of people, yet the control these people have over themselves may not be much more than the control people had over themselves in the days of swords and bows and arrows.

With the development of psychoanalysis from Freud came also the realisation that we are very confused about our own feelings. Often we really do not know what we feel. Our thoughts and our emotions get terribly confused and at odds with each other. I believe F.M. used to say: "We don't think half as much as we feel we think." We are indeed very confused between how we think we ought to feel, and what our feelings actually are. This is Theme 3 - out of touch with our feelings. Often, as a result of work in some form of psychotherapy or counselling, people come to realise that feelings they thought they had were not at all how they feel. Typical examples are anger and

resentment, suppressed and turned into an appearance of caring deeply for the people around you; fear suppressed and turned into aggression against the people around you; and depression, which a person may refuse to recognise and thus become a rather superficial, outwardly cheerful but isolated character. The private lives of professional comedians sometimes show this. These examples are common currency in individual psychotherapy.

Also in depth psychology is another of our common themes, Theme 7, the vital force or life energy, and we will have more to say about this theme later. (It may be that modern science has made this concept untenable, but it remains as a powerful metaphor that engages the imagination.) Freud called it libido, and saw it as some sort of basic energy, largely sexual. Jung also called it libido, but saw it as something more than just sexual. A life energy. He also termed it psychic energy.

### **Reich and Perls.**

Moving down the chart now to Reich and Perls. Wilhelm Reich, founder of Reichian psychotherapy, vegetotherapy, orgone therapy, progenitor of bioenergetics and neo-Reichian therapy. Reich was trained in psychoanalysis with Freud, but after working as an orthodox analyst for a while, he became interested in how his patients' physical characteristics correlated with their psychological attitudes. He was particularly observant of the patient's posture and breathing patterns and began using massage and deep breathing to aid the verbal therapy sessions. He is a tremendously important figure in showing us the connection to the physical body of our emotional states and psychological attitudes. The body as a map of the unconscious. The musculature as an expression of the psyche. Reich's term for it was muscular armouring. Reading the body as a way into the mind. Working with the body as a way of bringing these things into awareness and hence having greater control of them.

Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt therapy, had a way of observing unconscious gestures and mannerisms, for example, and using them as a key to what the body was expressing, and how that showed the hidden motivations behind our outward verbal and conscious expression.

So Theme 4 comes in here. Integration of body and mind. Working with the one to affect the other.

Also, here, Theme 7. Reich became more and more interested in libido as a physical reality he called bio-energy, or orgone energy. He believed he could prove its existence in laboratory science. That has certainly been much disputed, but it is useful to know that he said the flow of this life energy could be blocked by the muscular tensions associated with psychological conflict,

and this damming up of energy could eventually result in disease.

Both Reich and Perls derived the basics of their approach to psychology from Freud, and so Themes 1, 2 and 3, which we have already looked at in connection with psychoanalysis, would be taken for granted by these two men.

### **Sensory Awareness Training.**

Moving on down the left hand side of the chart, the names of Gindler and Selver are names that will not be known to most of you, but I put them in because they were very influential in America in the development of Humanistic Psychology, particularly via the Esalen Institute. They very clearly exemplify another of our common themes. Elsa Gindler was a German lady who had TB and set about trying to cure herself. She succeeded in doing this by examining her own way of breathing, and bringing about improvements in it that eventually cured the TB. In the process, she felt that she had removed unnatural interferences subconsciously imposed on her breathing and got back to something that could be called "natural breathing."

Following on her success in this and the TB clearing up, she got on to the idea that all of us in a civilised society seem to greatly interfere with the natural working of all sorts of physiological functions. We interfere with our posture, balance, movement, and with the way we use our senses: sight, hearing, touch, even taste and smell; and, of course, the kinesthetic sense. So she began running workshops in which she taught exercises to help people get back in touch with natural functioning. Trying to remove the accretions and distortions that civilised living seems to put on the way we use our bodies. Hence Theme 5 here - the search for natural function or non-interference.

Elsa Gindler trained a lady called Charlotte Selver, who went to America and there met Alan Watts, whom we will come on to a bit later, but who was a very influential teacher and philosopher. He wrote a great deal about Eastern Mysticism and Western psychology and he introduced Charlotte Selver to the Esalen Institute in California, where she gave her classes in Sensory Awareness Training. These classes had a great influence on some of the people who were developing Humanistic Psychology, including Fritz Perls and Erich Fromm.

### **Jung**

So, to return to the top of the chart, still under Depth Psychology, we will look at the strand that passes through Jung. In Jung we find a more positive approach to the unconscious or subconscious than we find in the Freudian writings. In Jung there is an emphasis that the unconscious is not just a bag of repressed drives and instincts, which would run amok if not controlled, but Jung stressed that within the psyche as a whole, taking the conscious and unconscious together, there is a fundamental drive towards wholeness, a fundamental drive towards balance, towards harmonisation. In every individual, if in their way of life they are becoming more and more unbalanced, their own nature will, unconsciously if necessary, lead them into circumstances that may jolt them back into balance. Your own psyche will create problems that will try to bring you back into harmony.

Self-balancing, self-healing, self-realisation. Individuation - Jung's own word for this process when it is developed consciously. Further on down that strand on the map there is Roberto Assagioli, who many of you will know as the founder of Psychosynthesis. Here also is Transpersonal Psychology - which is like a combination of Jung and Assagioli with the concepts

of a few others like Abraham Maslow thrown in.

The interesting thing here for us is Assagioli's concept of sub-personalities. This refers to the fact that we all seem to have different aspects of ourselves that cause us to behave almost like a different person in different situations. You know how a man can be one person at home with his wife and family, a quite different person an hour later at work, and another different person again over a drink with friends in the evening. It is as if we all go around driving in a mini-bus with half a dozen or more characters who keep knocking each other out of the driving seat and taking over the wheel for a bit. In order to get more control over ourselves, we need to find some central core, some sort of "I", or centre, or self, which will integrate these fragmentary subpersonalities in ourselves and choose who is going to take the wheel at any given time.

Which takes us to the last of our common themes, Theme 6, the search for a central core to integrate the parts. A Centre, Self, or I. Trying to get ourselves centred. A good expression to indicate a state of calm, of balance, and of integration.

### **Bodywork.**

So, leaving that part of the map, we go up to the top and into the middle. I've put the label "Bodywork." It is only a label to indicate specifically body-oriented disciplines.

Osteopathy and Chiropractic are the most widely known and influential of these. It is quite curious how they both arose in the U.S.A. at about the same time. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, both D.D. Palmer and Andrew Taylor Still seem to have come up independently with very similar ideas, perhaps responding to a collective need in the way that Freud and Jung seemed to be doing.

How do they fit in to our pattern of common themes? Well, clearly Theme 4 - integration of body and mind. We may think of chiropractors and osteopaths as being very mechanical and structural in their approach, but the writing of the early pioneers suggests an awareness of the human being as an organic whole, body and mind together. Emotional, psychological, spiritual states, all interrelating with the physical state.

Here we find a link with Themes 5 and 7. Quite commonly now, the rationale of a modern osteopath is to say something like this: "I am working on the spine to bring into balance the sympathetic nervous system which is very easily disturbed at its outlets from the spinal cord, and so by working on aligning and balancing the spine, I am aligning and balancing the nervous system and alleviating disturbances in the natural functioning of the organism. (Theme 5.) This will also contribute to the free flow of vital energy through the body and aid self-healing processes. (Theme 7.)

Theme 6 also crops up here. The spine itself is seen as central in both these disciplines. It is what integrates, influences for better or worse every aspect of the organism's functioning.

Off on two side-shoots on this part of the map we have:

### **Rolf and Feldenkrais.**

You will all know these two. Relevant points for us are: the body as the way into the psyche. Reading the body as the key to the unconscious. Working on the body as the key to reorganizing elements at other levels - emotional, intellectual, and so on. All the things that come under the

heading of Theme 4.

So leaving the bodywork field, and skipping on across to the heading:

### **Eastern Religions.**

I have put this in because I think Eastern thought is becoming an important influence in the Western world. The first influential thinker to show any signs of influence of Eastern ideas was probably Schopenhauer back in the 19th century. But in the last 20 years more and more people have come into contact with Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist ideas. Indeed, I woke up one morning last week to hear, on BBC Radio 4, the Dean of King's College, London, telling us about Chinese Taoist philosophy. There are a lot of popular books on the subject. In particular, books such as *The Tao of Physics*, and *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, which emphasizes parallels between Eastern ideas and some of the most recent developments in modern Western science.

Moving on down this line I have written two Sanskrit words - Samsara and Karma. I have written them because they exemplify the Eastern approach to Themes 1 and 2 in our list of common themes. Theme 1 - consciousness becoming conscious of itself and the unconscious, and Theme 2 - the need to understand and control our reactions.

Samsara is the word to describe the chain of events that keep us going from one lifetime to another. Karma is the law of cause of effect. The way in which our past actions determine our future circumstances. Usually this is seen in terms of reincarnation, but the same thing applies within one lifetime. Our reactions in one situation being the cause of the next situation. Action and reaction. Cause and effect. There is a sense in the Eastern writing on this subject of being driven by unconscious urges, being bound, as they say, on the wheel of Samsara, the wheel that carries us inexorably from one existence to the next and from one life situation to the next. This sense is very much akin to that expressed in Themes 1 and 2 and exemplified in depth psychology. The sense that we are driven by unconscious desires and have little control of ourselves. Can we get off the wheel of Samsara was the burning question of the Buddha. Can we free ourselves from unconscious compulsions?

### **Mindfulness**

Eastern religions are rich in practical methods for helping people to free themselves. One of the key methods is what is called in Buddhist disciplines Mindfulness. Mindfulness simply means trying to be more conscious, more aware of ourselves, here and now as we are acting and reacting with each other. It is one of the key practical techniques for dealing with the problems of Themes 1 and 2.

### **Meditation**

Mindfulness in daily life is also brought to a precise focus in the specific activity of meditation. Of course many different meditation techniques have been developed in the East, and it is remarkable how in the last ten years they have become more and more accepted in the Western world.

What is meditation? It is an enormous subject and one into which we cannot go too deeply. A few aspects relevant to our attempt to extrapolate common themes are: Meditation as quietening the mind to reach deeper levels - consciousness immersing itself in the unconscious (Theme 1). Meditation as quietening the nervous system to restore natural functioning. This is emphasized by

TM practitioners. They say that regular practice of meditation dissipates layers of disharmony we have put on top of the proper functioning of the nervous system (Theme 5).

This aspect of meditation as removing interference with natural functioning is especially apparent in the Zen tradition, which in turn brings in Alan Watts, who was a prolific writer interpreting Zen to the West, so it is appropriate that he should have the link to Charlotte Selver and Sensory Awareness Training. Non-interference is emphasized in one Zen school where it is said that just sitting is meditating. While we are on this subject, everyone who has ever read any Zen literature has a favorite Zen story and can rarely resist the compulsion to tell it, so here is mine. It is very short. It concerns the Master who said: "When you sit, just sit. When you stand, just stand. When you walk, just walk. Above all, don't wobble."

Wobbling in this context could be defined as conflict between two different activities trying to go on at the same time. In this kind of meditation, our aim would be to quieten everything down until only absolutely essential activity is happening in the body. In other words, in our Alexander jargon, inhibiting all unnecessary doing. It is said that if you can achieve that you will come into contact with your true nature (Theme 5 - search for natural functioning.)

Moving on down to the last branch of the eastern part of the chart we have the techniques of:  
**The Martial Arts and Yoga.**

Some of these psychophysical disciplines are now very common and popular in the west. Under the martial arts I have put Chi-Kung, which may not be familiar to you. I have put it because chi, as many of you will know, is the Chinese word for life energy, vital energy. And Chi-Kung is the art of learning to develop and circulate consciously that energy. It is a system of meditations, internal exercises, postures and movements which can be practiced as part of a martial art discipline, or it can be practiced as an independent discipline for its own sake.

So, Theme 7 - renewed interest in vital force, bio-energy, chi. Looking at this in the context of the martial arts and Chi-Kung, we see the importance of physical energy. A Chinese Tai Chi teacher I used to go to always spoke of the spine as a central channel. He used to say, "Be an open channel for your chi," as the aim of what he was trying to teach. Here again, Theme 6. Within the chi disciplines, the spine seems to be the central channel that integrates all the energy flows.

In Yoga, of course, we have practices concerned with the circulation of prana - prana being the Sanskrit word which means much the same thing as the Chinese chi. Again the emphasis is on physical alignment and freedom, and the central function of the spine itself.

Moving over now to the far right hand side of the chart and the section headed Esoteric, I should more accurately call that:

### **Modern Western Esoteric Teaching.**

One could roughly say that the first big influence in this area was Helena Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society, which is why I have put it in there, but it is there purely as a historical reference point. Out of it came two figures that are of interest to us - Rudolph Steiner and Alice Bailey, but I want first to jump to the bottom of that line on the map and look at Gurdjieff.

### **Gurdjieff**

He was a teacher of Russian origins, who came out of the Sufi tradition of the Middle East. He is



particularly interesting to us, because more than anyone else in this whole schema he emphasized the fragile and fleeting nature of human consciousness. Gurdjieff used to say that everyone is asleep, everyone walks around in a state of waking sleep. We assume that because we fall asleep at night and wake up in the morning, we are then conscious; and we easily delude ourselves in this way because if someone comes up and says, "Are you conscious?" we immediately wake up out of this state of waking sleep and say: "Yes, of course I am," and straight afterwards we fall asleep again. So here we have Theme 1 again. Gurdjieff also emphasized stopping our automatic reactions. He actually taught an exercise called the STOP exercise. He would say that, because we are half-asleep, we go through our lives like automatons, acting and reacting on automatic pilot. Much of the Gurdjieff work to wake us up is also to help us to stop reacting mindlessly and begin to make real choices in the way we behave. Theme 2. Theme 4 crops up here also, as Gurdjieff work involves a lot of body-awareness training through special movements and manual labor. In fact, in a book called, Views from the Real World, Gurdjieff is quoted as saying that the way to control of the emotions is through greater control of the physical body.

Also strongly evident here is Theme 6. Gurdjieff talked of the need to find our Real I, that center in ourselves from which we could regain control over the fragmentary part of ourselves.

### **Steiner and Bailey**

Going back now to Rudolph Steiner and Alice Bailey, their work is a little more difficult to fit into this schema of things and to assimilate to our work as Alexander teachers. But within the Steiner and Bailey writings there is a lot of interesting and suggestive material about subtle energy flows and the chakra system. I will just throw in a few points that you might keep at the back of your mind when considering the broader significance of our own work.

In both these teachings it is said that a human being is basically an energy transformer and that our purpose here on earth is to take in energies from the world around us, process them through the lower chakras or centers which are in the lower part of the body and raise the energy up to the heart and the head, the heart and the head symbolizing the higher levels of feeling and higher levels of thinking that human beings are capable of. It is stressed that it is only safe and sensible to do this, to raise energies up to the heart and the head, when we are well grounded, that is when the lower centers, the lower half of the body, are properly functioning.

We are told that energy is to be raised up through the spine to open the heart and to light the lamp of consciousness in the head. Lighting the one Light, the one Light because consciousness is common to us all. In all of this it is interesting to consider what may be the role of the neck and the back. The back must be free and open to let energy rise through the spine, and the neck above all must be free, free to allow energy to pass up from below to sustain the light of consciousness, and free to allow that light to pass back down again and so to enlighten the lower centers of the body. Actually, Themes 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7 all crop up in esoteric work, but that is enough now on the items on the chart.

### **The Role of the Alexander Technique**

To come back now to the Alexander Technique and its tendency to seem isolated from everything else. We want at this point to look at how the Alexander Technique relates to these seven themes that we have seen come up again and again in modern consciousness. I think that what the Alexander Technique has to contribute to this broader scheme of things is something essentially very practical. It is the very precise tool for putting into practice the ideals of these larger movements. We are not here as Alexander teachers to present a grand philosophy to people -

there is plenty of grand philosophy in all these other things - but we can offer a precise and practical tool literally to embody, to bring into the physical body and everyday life, ideas and ideals expressed in these other fields. So to look at our work in the context of the seven themes, we will go through them quickly one by one and see what we can contribute.

Theme 1. Consciousness becoming conscious of itself and the unconscious or subconscious.

Well, it is pretty clear how we relate to that. "The conscious mind must be quickened" - that is a quote from F.M.A. Man's Supreme Inheritance - the title of one of his books. He defined our Supreme Inheritance as our ability to develop conscious guidance and control. And from that book, there's a very nice little quote:

"Returning to my definition of the subconscious self, it will be seen that I regard it as a manifestation of the partly-conscious vital essence, functioning at times very vividly, but on the whole incompletely, and from this it follows that our endeavors should be directed to perfecting the self-consciousness of the vital essence." (Man's Supreme Inheritance by F.M.A. p. 25, 1957 edition.)

That quote seems very interesting in the light of all the themes we are talking about here tonight. The vital essence becoming more conscious of itself.

Theme 2. The need to understand and control our reactions.

Very obviously, Inhibition. The practical application of inhibition. Teaching people that you do have a choice. You can actually choose here and now not to react in the way you have become programmed to react up until now. Incidentally, quite by chance I recently came across the following quote about inhibition:

"One of the dangers of our civilization is that one function of the nervous system, which is to prompt to action, to excite, should grow out of all proportion to another function, which is to inhibit, to control, to quiet, to enforce rest." (The Biology of the Seasons by Prof. J. A. Thompson, 1911.)

Professor Thompson also uses the picturesque analogy of modern man having a steam engine in his brain that pounds along relentlessly at full speed. This steam engine has a safety valve that shunts steam through a whistle when too much pressure has built up. However, in our way of life we have developed the dangerous ability, with distractions and drugs, to ignore the whistle that is telling us it is time for inhibition, time to damp down the pressure. Instead, the engine races on until it self-destructs.

is time for inhibition, time to damp down the pressure. Instead, the engine races on until it self-destructs.

That was written in 1911, one year after the first publication of Man's Supreme Inheritance, by a Professor J. A. Thompson, who as far as I know, had no connection with F. M. An interesting example of these ideas being in the air at that time.

Theme 3. Being out of touch with our feelings.

This I think relates closely to faulty sensory appreciation. I know we use that phrase to refer to kinesthetic perceptions, to say that our feedback from our bodies had become unreliable. But

some important schools of modern psychology, particularly stemming from the Reichian tradition, would suggest that those people who are very out of touch with their own body are likely to be very cut off from their feelings. And a distorted body image is likely to go with emotional reactions that are continually out of proportion to the immediate situation. Alexander Lowen's books give a good insight into this.

Theme 4. Integration of body and mind.

There is nothing much to say about this except that while it is often taken for granted these days, F.M. was truly one of the great modern pioneers in insisting on psychophysical unity. Psychophysical integration. Treating the bodymind as a unit.

Theme 5. The search for natural functioning (non-interference).

What we refer to as non-doing could be described as removing interferences with the essential activity of the organism.

In practical terms, as I am standing here, I need to inhibit any unnecessary efforts to hold myself up artificially, I need to direct to facilitate the natural working of those muscles and other parts that do have to operate to keep me up against gravity, and I have to release the considerable tensions caused by the stress of standing up here talking to all of you! By getting the natural balance of the head and spine working, I will also be helping my breathing, circulation and digestion, all my life support systems to function naturally.

The stripping away of non-essential activity in order to allow natural functioning is obviously an important part of our work.

Theme 6. The search for a central core to integrate the parts, a Center, Self or "I".

Well, the Primary Control. The primary control is indeed that relationship within our body that integrates the various parts of the body. It integrates us on a physical and neurophysiological level. And, mysteriously, it also seems to help us feel more integrated psychologically when we have this primary balance working in ourselves. You could say that, figuratively, the primary control in Alexander's sense helps to integrate the head and the body. That is, it helps to integrate the conscious, thinking part of ourselves with the instinctive, feeling part of ourselves. In most of us in modern society, these two aspects, thinking and feeling, get very much out of joint, out of harmony.

The good functioning of the primary control (head/neck/back/balance) is probably an indicator of someone's state of being and health, both physically and psychologically. It may also be an indicator of the degree to which the person is able to act authentically, to behave and communicate from their deepest self.

This is something we all need to work at, consciously and continually, no matter what our level of experience.

Theme 7. Renewed interest in vital force, life energy, bio energy, etc.

Now this is a tricky one, but I would say that the way we talk about Direction within the Alexander Technique has links to this theme. It is a tricky one because some Alexander teachers are extremely attracted to this way of thinking and some are extremely put off by it, and would

prefer that we didn't discuss such things at all, or use such terms. And the strong division of opinion on this subject is very apparent in other disciplines, too.

In this respect I was fascinated to discover that in September a magazine called *The Journal of Alternative Medicine* published its description of a disagreement between two leading organizations representing Complimentary and Alternative Medicine in this country. One, the Institute of Complimentary Medicine, says the following:

"The philosophy of all the natural therapies depends on an appreciation of the so-called 'life energies'. When the energy is interrupted, a series of problems occurs which may potentially result in a lessening of well-being or produce the symptoms of disease. The natural therapies attempt, by individual methods, to restore the natural flow of life energy by removing the causes of these problems. The practitioner's ability to understand the condition of the 'life energies' is therefore crucial to the success of the treatment." (*Journal of Alternative Medicine*, September, 1986.)

According to the *Journal*, the other organization, the Council for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine, says nothing publicly about such things and seems to feel it would be best not to discuss such things in public. So we are not the only people to feel divided on this subject.

A useful way to help bridge this division is to treat descriptions of energy flows in the body as descriptions of subjective phenomena. In other words, when the Chinese sages of many centuries ago practiced their Taoist meditations and chi-raising exercises, they all experienced feelings that they described as energy flowing through channels in the body. Whether or not such energy and such channels exist objectively does not alter the fact that enough people experienced the same feelings to pass descriptions of them down through the generations.

We complain sometimes about the inadequacy of language to describe kinesthetic sensations, so we could usefully consider descriptions of vital energies, chi or prana, as extensions of kinesthetic language, new ways of describing internal sensations. We might say, "It feels as if energy is flowing from here to here," without having to ascribe objective reality to it. Certainly, in casual conversation, Alexander teachers have a tendency to refer to direction as if it were an energy flow. We speak of a teacher having "very strong direction" or "lots of direction". And teachers talk of an upward flow through the spinal column.

In the *Tai Chi Classics* (the traditional writings describing *Tai Chi Chuan*) it is said that you must direct your movements by mind intent, not by muscular force, then you will develop chi or vital energy. It seems to me that that is not a bad description of direction without doing in our terms.

### **Conclusion.**

That concludes our tour through the psychophysical spectrum. I think it is a valid and worthwhile exercise to look at the broader context of what has been going on around us, extrapolate common themes, and see how we relate to them. I hope you found it worthwhile, too. I would just remind you at the end, as I did at the beginning, that we need to view all this with bifocal lenses. To see with the distance lens how much we have in common with activities and pursuits that many thousands of people have been involved in throughout this century - you might call it the evolution of consciousness in the physical body - but to see also with the close-up lens how we have a unique, precise and practical contribution to make to that larger context.

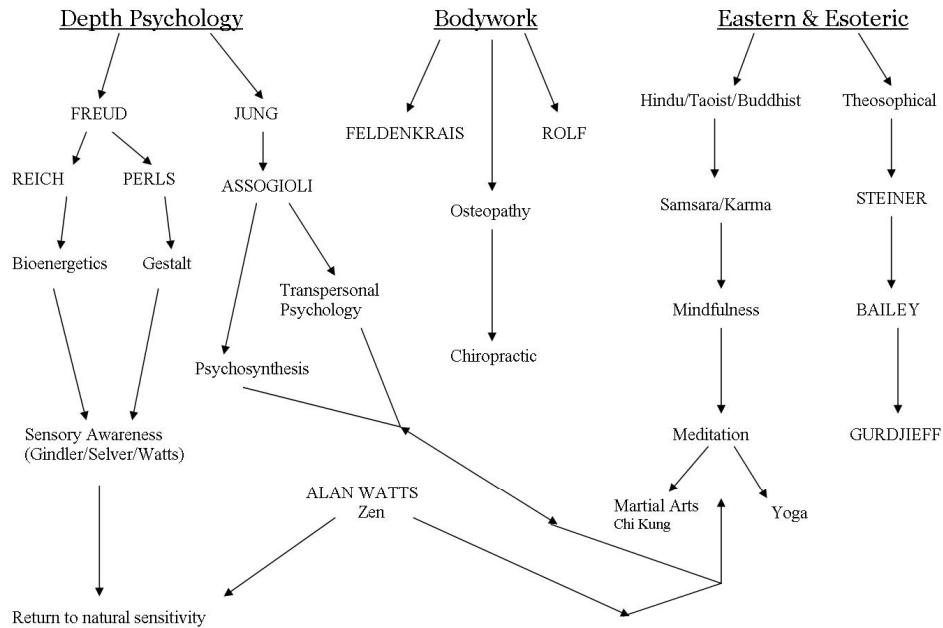
### **Postscript.**

After this lecture I was asked where I would put the Alexander Technique on the chart in Appendix I. On reflection, it seems to me that the Technique is the window through which we as Alexander teachers may view the whole chart. Anyone working in one of the other disciplines mentioned here could prepare a similar lecture and a similar map, removing his own discipline and finding a place for us on the map. His own discipline would be the window through which he sees the larger context.

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## Appendix I

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## Appendix II GENERAL THEMES

1. Consciousness becoming conscious of itself and the unconscious/subconscious.
2. Need to understand and control our reactions.
3. Out of touch with feelings.
4. The integration of the body and mind.
5. The search for natural functioning (non-interference).
6. Search for a central core to integrate the parts, a Center, Self or "I".
7. Renewed interest in "vital force", bio-energy, Chi, Prana, etc.