

I. Distinct theory and body of knowledge that constitutes the F. Matthias Alexander Technique and distinguish it from other means of improving human use and functioning.

The Theory of the Alexander Technique

The Alexander Technique is an indirect method of improving human use and functioning. Practice of the Technique promotes a continually improving coordination, support, flexibility, balance, and ease of movement.

F.M. Alexander believed that humans evolved in an environment that did not change very much for thousands of years. Humans, like other animals, used unconscious instinct to direct their movements. Using unconscious, unreasoned, instinctive responses worked, because change happened very slowly, and humans had plenty of time to evolve and adapt to changes. However, as humans developed different cultures and civilizations, change began happening much more rapidly. Unfortunately, humans still used instinctive, unreasoned responses that were suited to a different and more slowly changing environment. Alexander believed that relying on these instinctive responses in new situations is the cause of many if not all of the problems facing civilized peoples.

Alexander developed his Technique when trying to solve persistent vocal problems that threatened his career as an actor. He observed himself in the context of his own life and discovered the following important concepts:

NOTE: We made a distinction between Alexander Technique concepts and Alexander Technique principles. A concept is something that would exist in the world if Alexander had never been born—for example, Primary Control. Primary Control operates even if a person doesn't know about it. Principles are more general and include how one uses the concepts.

Alexander Technique Concepts

6. Primary Control
7. Use affects functioning (The Universal Constant)
8. Psycho-physical Unity
9. Faulty sensory appreciation
10. Endgaining

Alexander Technique Principles

12. Principle of Prevention on a General Basis (Inhibition and Direction)
13. Principle of Indirect Action (Conscious Direction/Means Whereby Principle)

Definitions

Alexander Technique Concepts (adopted by ATI members in 1998)

NOTE: the numbers in parentheses refer to the number of each item in the above list of concepts.

14 (6) **Primary Control:** Alexander discovered that moving his head in a way he described as "pulling back of the head," resulted in a shortening of his stature, and a worsening of the quality of his functioning. He also discovered that allowing his head to move freely in a direction he described as "forward and up" from the top of his spine resulted in a lengthening of his stature and an improvement in the quality of his functioning. He labeled this discovery "primary control," because this relationship of neck, head and torso was of primary importance in determining the quality of his functioning, and in organizing his reactions into a well-coordinated whole. Alexander writes:

"...there is a primary control of the use of the self, which governs the working of all the mechanisms and so renders the control of the complex human organism comparatively simple." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 59) "This primary control...depends upon a certain use of the head and neck in relation to the use of the rest of the body..." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 60).

15 (7) **Use Affects Functioning** (*The Universal Constant*): Alexander discovered that how he used himself affected how he functioned. He misused himself badly, and as a result had health problems, including trouble with his voice. When he stopped using himself badly, the functioning of his voice improved, as did his overall health. He realized that there was a fundamental relationship between the manner in which he used himself and the general functioning of his whole self that influenced all his activity for either good or ill. He further realized that this relationship between use and functioning is a constant, that is, a person's functioning will continually improve or worsen depending on how they use themselves. He writes:

"A good manner of use of the self exerts an influence for good upon general functioning which is not only continuous, but also grows stronger as time goes on, becoming....a constant influence tending always to raise the standard of functioning and improve the manner of reaction. A bad manner of use, on the other hand, continuously exerts an influence for ill tending to lower the standard of general functioning, thus becoming a constant influence tending always to interfere with every functional activity...and harmfully affecting the manner of every reaction." (from *Universal Constant in Living*, p. 8-9) "...our manner of use is a constant influence for good or ill upon our general functioning. (from *Universal Constant in Living*, p.12) (italics Alexander's)

16. (8) **Psycho-Physical Unity**: Alexander discovered that if he made a change in one part of his body, that change affected the rest of his body as well. He also discovered that there is no division between "mind" and "body" but that we are indivisible wholes. He writes:

"...the unity of the human organism is indivisible...[such that]...any change in a part means a change in the whole, and the parts of the human organism are knit so closely into a unity that any attempt to make a fundamental change in the working of a part is bound to alter the use and adjustment of the whole." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 45) "[E]very act is a reaction to a stimulus received through the sensory mechanisms, [and] no act can be described as wholly "mental" or wholly "physical." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 43)

17. (9) **Faulty Sensory Appreciation**: While Alexander was experimenting, trying to discover a better way to use his voice, he would decide to move in a certain way. He would use his feelings (what he called sensory appreciation) to know if he had actually moved in the way he had decided to move. However, when he checked in a mirror, he found out that what he felt he was doing in his body was not what he actually was doing. He realized that he could not rely on feelings alone for accurate information about change. Alexander writes:

"Almost all civilized human creatures have developed a condition in which the sensory appreciation (feeling) is more or less imperfect and deceptive, and it naturally follows that it cannot be relied upon in re-education, readjustment and co-ordination, or in our attempts to put right something we know to be wrong with our psycho-physical selves." (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 98)

Alexander explains how faulty sensory appreciation can develop:

"We get into the habit of performing a certain act in a certain way, and we experience a certain feeling in connection with it which we recognize as "right." The act and the particular feeling associated with it become one in our recognition." (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 86, italics Alexander's)

In addition, Alexander believed that if our sensory appreciation is faulty our judgment will be faulty also. He writes:

"...[O]ur judgment is based on experience, [and] we must also see that where this experience is incorrect and deceptive, the resulting judgment is bound to be misleading and out of touch with reality. We have to recognize, therefore, that our sensory peculiarities are the foundation of what we think of as our opinions...." (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 96, italics Alexander's)

18. (10) **End-Gaining**: During his experimentation, Alexander discovered that he had a very strong desire to go immediately for whatever end he had in mind, using his habitual, unconscious responses, instead of considering a better way (means-whereby) he could achieve his end. He called this desire "end-gaining," and contrasted it with using the best means whereby to gain his end. He writes:

[Many people employ a direct procedure when endeavouring to gain a desired end]. "This direct procedure is associated with dependence upon sub-conscious guidance and control, leading, in cases where a condition of mal-co-ordination is present, to an unsatisfactory use of the mechanisms and to an increase in the defects and peculiarities already existing." (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 7, ftn.)

From the above concepts, Alexander derived two principles. We call them the Principle of Prevention on a General Basis (Inhibition and Conscious Direction) and the Principle of Indirect Action (Conscious Direction/Means Whereby Principle).

19. Principle of Prevention on a General Basis (Inhibition and Conscious Direction).

During his experimenting, Alexander discovered that the first step to improving his use, and therefore his functioning, when using his voice, was to prevent himself from making his habitual response to the idea of speaking. Alexander used the word "inhibition" to describe this principle of stopping himself from reacting in an unconscious, habitual way. He further discovered that he could prevent himself from reacting unconsciously if he consciously projected directions that did not allow him to react in his habitual way. Preventing himself from reacting in an habitual (and in his case harmful) way allowed any activity he performed to have a beneficial effect on his overall functioning. Alexander writes:

[The principle of prevention is] "...concerned primarily with non-doing in the fundamental sense of what we should not do in the use of ourselves in our daily activities; in other words, with preventing that habitual misuse of the psycho-physical mechanisms which renders these activities a constant source of harm to the organism." (*Universal Constant in Living*, p. 130) "The preventive messages projected serve to stop off the misdirection associated with harmful habitual use of ourselves in the performance of an act..." (*Universal Constant in Living*, p. 111)

20. Principle of Indirect Action (Conscious Direction/Means Whereby Principle)

Alexander also found that he end-gained, that is, he went directly for his end (in his case, speaking). He responded in an unreasoned, habitual way, and relied on the feelings associated with this habitual response to decide if he had done what he wanted to do. As he experimented, however, he developed a new procedure to use. It first involved observing himself to see what he was actually doing; then reasoning out the best means he could use to improve what he was doing; and finally it involved consciously putting the new means into effect. He writes that he must "analyse the conditions of use present; select (reason out) the means whereby a more satisfactory use could be brought about; [and] project consciously the directions required for putting these means into effect." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 25) (italics Alexander's).

This new procedure was an indirect way to gain his end. It involved conscious, reasoned analysis, and a conscious directing of himself. Alexander writes:

"The "means-whereby" principle...involves a reasoning consideration of the causes of the conditions present, and an indirect instead of a direct procedure on the part of the person endeavouring to gain the desired "end." (*Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 7, ftn)

"Means-whereby"...indicate[s] the reasoned means to the gaining of an end...includ[ing] the inhibition of the habitual use of the mechanisms of the organism, and the conscious projection of new directions necessary to the performance of the different acts involved in a new and more satisfactory use of these mechanisms." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 27, ftn). Direction "...indicate[s] the process involved in projecting messages from the brain to the mechanisms and in conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms." (*The Use of the Self*, p. 20, ftn).

The following information is included as a resource.

A Recommended Reading List

This list of chapters and books was recommended by ATI members and teacher trainers. They believe that people who read from this list will have a solid understanding of the Alexander Technique Concepts and Principles

22. From Primitive Conditions to Present Needs (from *Man's Supreme Inheritance*) Part 1, Chapter 1
23. Habits of Thought and of Body (from *Man's Supreme Inheritance*) (Part 1, Chapter 6)
24. Education and re-education (from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*) Part 2, Chapter 1
25. Incorrect Conception (from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*) Part 2, Chapter 2
26. Imperfect Sensory Appreciation (from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*) Part 2, Chapter 3
27. Illustration (from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*) Part 2, Chapter 4
28. The Evolution of a Technique (from *The Use of the Self* Chapter 1)
29. The Golfer Who Cannot Keep His Eyes on the Ball (from *The Use of the Self*) Chapter 3
30. The Stutterer (from *The Use of the Self*) Chapter 4
31. The Constant Influence of Manner of Use in Relation to Change (from *The Universal Constant in Living*) Chapter 5
32. *Freedom to Change* by Frank Pierce Jones

References and other information

Man's Supreme Inheritance, Mouritz, 1996.

Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual, Mouritz, 2004.

Use of the Self, Victor Gollancz 1985.

Universal Constant in Living, Dutton, 1941; Centerline Press, 1986.

Translations: Currently a translation of *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* and *The Universal Constant in Living* is available in German; translations of *The Use of the Self* are available in German, French and Japanese; a translation of *Man's Supreme Inheritance* in Japanese will be available in 2015 and *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (in Japanese) is currently projected to be published in 2017.

The Body of Knowledge of the Alexander Technique

The body of knowledge that constitutes the Alexander Technique is growing rapidly. Because we could never make a complete listing of that knowledge, we decided to simply list categories, that is, different sources people could use to learn about the Technique. We have listed them more or less historically.

1. Writings by F.M. Alexander.
2. Written memoirs of people who knew Alexander.
3. Biographical accounts of the Alexanders, and the history of the Technique.
4. Theoretical explorations and research into the Technique.
5. Journals, newsletters of Alexander Technique organizations, and proceedings of International Congresses.
6. Books about the Technique.
7. Oral history of the Technique.
8. Video tapes about the Technique.
9. The tradition of teaching that has been passed on, and is passed on to new generations of students. Embodied in this tradition is our own experiences, and the growth of our understanding about the Technique as we continue to learn.
10. Internet sites about the Technique.

II: Distinguish the Alexander Technique from other means of improving human use and functioning

Alexander believed that his Technique was one of “education in the widest sense of the word, in that it deals with the control of human reaction.” (UCL, p. 37) He believed that true change in people’s behavior would come about only if people learned to use the principles of his Technique. He believed that by learning and using his Technique people could prevent themselves from reacting in an unconscious, habitual way, and instead make new conscious choices about how to respond to any situation.

The five concepts (Primary Control, Psycho-Physical Unity, The Universal Constant, Faulty Sensory Appreciation and End-Gaining), and the two principles (Principle of Prevention on a General Basis and Principle of Indirect Action) listed above are the foundation of the practice of the Alexander Technique. Taken together they distinguish the Alexander Technique from other means of improving human use and functioning. Although other techniques may include some of the concepts, the Alexander Technique is the only method of improving human use and functioning which (1) teaches an indirect method of consciously preventing interference with one’s best use and functioning, and (2) the only method where its teachers consciously use these principles at the same time they are teaching the Technique to others.