

Jennifer Foster, MFA
Goddard College
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EDDY AND ALEXANDER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

*“Principle: a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine or assumption:
the laws or facts of nature underlying the working of an artificial device”*

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*“Science: knowledge or a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of
general laws especially as obtained and tested through scientific method”
Merriam Webster*

Science is knowledge about a subject. At the heart of all science is the understanding of principle. Fundamental principle is eternal; it has existed forever—with or without humanity’s consent or even acknowledgement. Once a principle has been investigated, uncovered, understood and utilized, new worlds of possibility open up.

My personal and artistic practice has long been based in and closely guided by two schools of thought that grew out of groundbreaking discoveries involving principle: Christian Science and the Alexander Technique. The former deals largely with the application of metaphysical principles to physical healing while the latter is concerned with the principles of proprioception and psycho-physical functioning. These principle-based systems were discovered by two different seekers, out of different circumstances, during different decades and on different continents, but their applications of principle harmonize and have provided me with a solid and infinitely intriguing foundation upon which to build my own performance and pedagogical theories.

A note as I begin: It is not possible for me to give a complete representation of the teachings of either Christian Science or the Alexander Technique. My purpose in this

essay is not to try to explain these systems in any comprehensive way, but simply to point out some of the interesting parallels I have observed between them and to share how my study of them has been informing my practice.

MARY BAKER EDDY

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) was a daughter of New England who early rejected the strict Calvinist ideology of her upbringing. In 1875, she published a textbook that explained the theology of spiritual healing she discovered from her in-depth study of the Bible. She did not set out to start a religion. She had cherished a hope that the (admittedly radical) ideas in her writings would be embraced by other thinkers and healers and would help transform religious and medical thought and practice. When she wrote about Christian Science, she was generally not referring to a religious sect, but to the name she gave to the science she had discovered behind Jesus' healing method. This is from her autobiography *Retrospection and Introspection*:

My immediate recovery from the effects of an injury caused by an accident, an injury that neither medicine nor surgery could reach, was the falling apple that led me to the discovery how to be well myself, and how to make others so.

Even to the homœopathic physician who attended me, and rejoiced in my recovery, I could not then explain the *modus* of my relief. I could only assure him that the divine Spirit had wrought the miracle—a miracle which later I found to be in perfect scientific accord with divine law.

I then withdrew from society about three years,—to ponder my mission, to search the Scriptures, to find the Science of Mind that should take the things of God and show them to the creature, and reveal the great curative Principle,—Deity.

The Bible was my textbook. It answered my questions as to how I was healed; but the Scriptures had to me a new meaning, a new tongue. Their spiritual signification appeared; and I apprehended for the first time, in their spiritual

meaning, Jesus' teaching and demonstration, and the Principle and rule of spiritual Science and metaphysical healing,—in a word, Christian Science (24).

She wrote and published her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, which in many ways was ahead of its time, speaking boldly to patriarchy and medical and religious intolerance and arrogance. Perhaps predictably, it was often met with tremendous resistance from the press, the pulpit and the medical establishment. At the same time, many people who read it found themselves permanently healed and regenerated in all areas of their lives. So a movement began to grow.

The principle Eddy discovered is simultaneously simple enough to state in a single sentence and challenging enough to materialistic human thought to require some 600 pages to fully elucidate. Eddy states in her book *No and Yes*: “God’s law is in three words, ‘I am All;’” (30). From her study and spiritual interpretation of the Bible, she gleaned a concise definition for God and included it in the Glossary found at the back of *Science and Health*: “God. The great I am; the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-acting, all-wise, all-loving, and eternal; Principle; Mind; Soul; Spirit; Life; Truth; Love; all substance; intelligence” (587). Eddy’s use here of “special and proper capitalization” (319), delineates seven interchangeably synonymous terms for God.

From my earliest education, understanding God to be Principle and Principle to be Love, I have understood myself and every person to be unique, wholly spiritual expressions of this infinitely good and loving Principle. And it follows that since divine Principle is God, and, as *Science and Health* also states, “God is everywhere” (473), I can observe and celebrate myriad evidences of Principle in operation. I also note the many ways the world and humans in particular seem so often to be experiencing the results of being misaligned with Principle—denying Spirit, forgetting Love, fearing many minds rather than seeking the one Mind, etc. It makes perfect sense to me that, like a

car's engine can only operate with the right balance of fuel, air and ignition, we will experience harmony in our endeavors only when we are living in accord with Principle. According to Jesus, “. . . the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke). I take that to mean that the state of harmony we seek is always readily available to us and is reached through a willingness to align thought (and the resulting action) with a God-like perspective. In other words, experience is mental, and we are able to bring discordant situations into harmony through a right understanding and application of Principle. For me the implications of this are endless and endlessly fascinating to contemplate.

So when I became serious about singing as a teenager, I was immediately struck by the principles inherent in singing and the interesting ways they were made manifest. For instance, during one of my first voice lessons, when I was vocalising up to higher and higher pitches, my teacher suggested I focus my gaze at a spot on the floor and think of singing right down through it. Remarkably, when I did that, the resulting singing was strong and clear and almost effortless. I recognized right away that what I thought about while I sang had a direct bearing on my results; in fact, in a broad sense, singing was entirely a mental activity. Focusing on sending my voice down through a small, fixed spot on the floor had the effect of focusing, stabilizing and grounding the breath used to produce the vocal tone. And the faster I visualized the movement of my voice through that spot, the more brilliant the sound became. (It might have taken hours for my teacher to explain the principles of function and muscular coordination responsible for this sound.) This phenomenon so coincided with my understanding of Christian Science. I immediately drew a parallel to the ways I had proven that my thinking had a direct impact on my experience, my health, my well-being in other areas. At every lesson I discovered new examples of how understanding and adhering to principle brought good results. It became my practice to make connections between the musical and technical principles I was learning and the deeper understanding of Principle I carried within me.

F. M. ALEXANDER

Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955), was a Tasmanian born actor who eventually migrated to England (with one 10-year residency in the United States during World War I). During his early career as a Shakespearean recitalist, he began to experience vocal fatigue and hoarseness which the medical field was unable to diagnose or cure. He successfully addressed this issue through exhaustive self-observation of his thoughts and movements. He discovered that his physical habits (or his “use”) were counter to the principles behind healthy physical function of the body, thus compromising his respiratory and vocal mechanisms. He also recognized that his physical habits were the result of faulty (but highly ingrained) thinking about how to achieve his performance goals. Through a rigorous scientific method, he realized that in order to correct his habits and free himself from his poor usage he needed to completely reorder his priorities surrounding performance and what he termed “end-gaining.” Not only did he achieve his own freedom, he also began to successfully share this knowledge with others, freeing them from often debilitating physical limitations and teaching them how to apply the principles of right functioning for themselves. His work resulted in the development of a new educative model which came to be termed the Alexander Technique.

During my college years, I was introduced to the Alexander Technique, which I have subsequently studied throughout my career. My first experience with Alexander work was startlingly dramatic. I observed right away how thinking of my head as gently floating upward while allowing the tensions in my neck and shoulders (of which I had not even been aware) to release, gave my movement an ease and fluidity. There were subtle adjustments throughout my whole body, and the immediacy of these effects was eye-opening. My singing was free, powerful and rich. Many of my vocal limitations, specifically a difficulty with projecting my lower range, were instantly mitigated. As with the earlier example from my vocal studies, I quickly recognized that allowing my use of

my body to be brought into fuller alignment with its original design resulted in improved function and better performance. I also experienced a clarity of thought that was hard to explain, but which I have since learned more about.

I have devoted a considerable portion of my graduate study to digging deeper into the history, theory and application of this somatic practice. This principle resonates with me far beyond physical alignment, and I've been pondering its deeper implications. While learning more about Alexander, I've noted many similarities between his life and work and those of Mary Baker Eddy. I have also been struck by the many ways Alexander's theories can be fruitfully layered into my art practice and my understanding of Christian Science.

MIND/BODY UNITY

“Anatomy, when conceived of spiritually, is mental self-knowledge, and consists in the dissection of thoughts to discover their quality, quantity, and origin.”

Mary Baker Eddy

In reading Alexander's own writings for the first time, these statements caught my attention right away:

I must admit that when I began my investigation, I, in common with most people, conceived of “body” and “mind” as separate parts of the same organism, and consequently believed that human ills, difficulties and shortcomings could be classified as either “mental” or “physical” and dealt with on specifically “mental” or specifically “physical” lines. My practical experiences, however, led me to abandon this point of view . . . it is impossible to separate “mental” and “physical” processes in any form of human activity (*Use 21*).

Although I have heard my Alexander teachers reference the concept of a mind/body connection, it was striking to me to read Alexander's own words on the topic. In the practice of Christian Science, the understanding that “mortal mind and body are one”

(S&H 177) is a vital aspect of learning how to overcome physical challenges (i.e. to heal).

Alexander wrote: “all training, whether it be educative or otherwise, ie, whether its object be the prevention or elimination of defect, error or disease, must be based upon the indivisible unity of the human organism” (*Use 23*).

PRIMARY CONTROL

*“Whatever holds human thought in line with unselfed love,
receives directly the divine power.”
Mary Baker Eddy*

One of Alexander’s main contributions to the kinesiological sciences was his discoveries about what he called “primary control.” Frank Pierce Jones defines this as

Alexander’s discovery that a dynamic relationship of the head and the neck promotes maximum lengthening of the body and facilitates movement throughout the body. Physiologically it is the stimulus (head-neck relation) which serves to activate the anti-gravity reflexes. Anatomically it is a dynamic balance of the forces acting on the head and spine such that the centre of gravity of the head moves forward and the weight of the head is counterbalanced by increased tension in the *Ligamentum nuchae* [the large ligament running down the back of the neck that supports the weight of the head]” (212).

Alexander’s discoveries about the importance of the head-neck relationship have since been tested and confirmed by scientists working in a number of disciplines.

In my own explorations of the Technique, I have been struck by several aspects of the concept of primary control. It has been so often demonstrated to me that arriving at and maintaining a right relationship between the head and neck (two obviously important players in a singer’s work) is not only a good idea, but it is ultimately the only logical way to approach the act of singing.

Jones summarizes nicely the main goal in this aspect of the Technique: “In teaching the principle to a musician . . . the aim is to increase the pupil’s awareness of himself as a whole, until he can detect the interference in the head-neck relationship . . .” He also describes what I have experienced in my praxis and why I am so eager to improve my skillful use of the Technique: “The value to singers lies in the fact that the primary control, when it is functioning as it should, prevents interference in the reflexes that control the vocal organs and the breathing mechanism” (185).

There is a lot to unpack about the principle of primary control and its impact on my thinking and practice. First, as Jones observed, “awareness of [myself] as a whole” is such an important part of this work. I have learned that a narrow, obsessive attempt to create or fix the head-neck relationship (or any other relationship or activity) brings its own set of problems. The right head-neck relationship isn’t something the individual must create—it already exists as a natural phenomenon within the design of the human structure. However, unless one lets go of any poor usage (caused primarily by unneeded holding in the neck and surrounding muscles), they won’t experience the natural perfect functioning available to them. So this act of recognizing what is interfering with right function and being willing to stop it is paramount.

Alexander stated, “Human activity is primarily a process of reacting unceasingly to stimuli received from within or without the self” (*Use* 52). He noted the ways humans have taken their natural “fight or flight” response to a staggering level of largely unrecognized dysfunction. As summarized by contemporary Alexander teacher Ariel Carson, “Fight/Flight/Freeze (FFF) is seen all throughout animals in nature, and even though we modern day humans don’t actually need to fight, run, or play dead to save our lives nearly as often as we once did when we lived out in the open with other animals who saw us as prey, we still often *feel* as though that were the case” (Carson). Carson names some of the symptoms that occur when we feel threatened including

tightness in the throat, jaw or chest, and a constriction of the breath. I have observed the responses I have to the many fearful thoughts and images that come to me daily, and they are very similar to those described above—tightness, constriction, a lack of breath. Alexander Technique provides tools for recognizing and reversing habitual reactions to the constant barrage of stimuli individuals face, especially under the stress of performance.

While I have made tremendous progress in my own use and performance by working with those tools, I have sought to go even deeper through a metaphysical understanding of what is at work here. One of my favorite statements in Eddy's writings is, "Divine Science, rising above physical theories, excludes matter, resolves *things* into *thoughts*, and replaces the objects of material sense with spiritual ideas" (S&H 123). Resolving things into thoughts is a critical part of my regular practice. From this standpoint, I have long pondered the correspondence between Alexander's discovery about these fight or flight patterns and the freedom available through primary control—or a conscious decision to accept the right relation of head to neck and allow the body to realign. For me these concepts metaphorically point back to Eddy's teaching that, in reality, "All is under the control of the one Mind, even God" (S&H 544). Just as I can notice tensions in the neck and release them, I have reasoned that when I observe myself as fearful, or anxious about how I will be judged by others when I perform, I can yield those fears to the understanding of my natural, intact relationship to God as Her effortless, peaceful and well loved expression. In practice, these activities go hand in hand. My Alexander work facilitates my ability to do my metaphysical work and vice versa.

As another example, when I notice my habit of pulling down through the shoulder girdle and collapsing my chest inward, I practice instead consciously yielding to breathing into my natural upright and open state. I am always interested to observe the stubborn inner resistance to this redirection of habit. I can hear one inner voice arguing against

allowing myself to assume my full height. Indeed, there is a kind of petulant insistence that “I” have so much to get done, I don’t have time to let go. I have recognized the constant, labored thought of “trying” to improve myself or of myopically accomplishing tasks to somehow prove my worth as being behind this habitual physical “efforting.” Further, the physical and mental freedom that comes with releasing and opening up inevitably meets the reactive thought “who do you think you are?” In the midst of the ongoing mental struggle, I ponder the following from Eddy’s Glossary definition of Ego: “There is but one I, or Us, but one divine Principle, or Mind, governing all existence” (S&H 588). The process of yielding both insidious misdirected thoughts and the resulting physical misdirection is one of constant self renewal. It is, I find, the practice of presence.

The several ways this process of yielding is at the core of my work is well described by Eddy: “Mortals are not like immortals, created in God’s own image; but infinite Spirit being all, mortal consciousness will at last yield to the scientific fact and disappear, and the real sense of being, perfect and forever intact, will appear” (S&H 295). My sense is that Alexander would be the first to agree with Eddy’s call for a yielding of consciousness to scientific facts. He worked his whole life to make others aware of this need.

Eddy understood primary control at the deepest spiritual level and also yearned to help others understand and practice it and experience the beneficial effects. She stated boldly, “Mind’s control over the universe, including man, is no longer an open question, but is demonstrable Science” (S&H 171).

In my performance practice I often need to stand in front of an audience quietly for up to 30 minutes at a time, which can be challenging and uncomfortable. I have been able to remain freer throughout my whole body by imagining a hand on my head gently encouraging me to let go of tensions, as I have experienced my Alexander teachers do

in lessons. I have also experimented with the image of “the hand of God” (metaphorically) gently and lovingly resting behind my shoulders, bringing an awareness of the divine presence to my physical use in that moment. This image is very powerful and enables me to release my voice into my reading work with a full and unforced resonance. I find it takes a lot of courage to enter this mental space, but I have never regretted stepping into it. I only wonder why I don’t do it more consistently. When my students have applied a new understanding of the head-neck relationship to their singing, they report simultaneously feeling that they are overtly controlling their voices less, but they sense more control. They always like what they experience even though it is often unfamiliar.

APPLICATION OF OTHER KEY PRINCIPLES

“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Paul’s letter to the Romans

Biographer Michael Bloch (who refers to Alexander throughout his book by his first and middle initials, F.M.) distills some key principles that came out of Alexander’s search for vocal health and that have become clearer to me during my graduate studies, moving my work to a new level of competency. He wrote: “FM found that the solution lay in seeking to ‘inhibit’ (that is, refrain from doing) what was wrong rather than ‘do’ what was right, in relying on ‘conscious control’ rather than unconscious habit, and in focusing the mind on the ‘means whereby’ rather than ‘the end to be gained’” (35). I have worked with each of these principles and continue to gain new insights about their application and metaphysical parallels.

Alexander had observed that no matter how conscious he was of his use, right at the moment he began his reciting, he would revert to his poor habits of pulling his head back and down and shortening his torso, even when he thought he was directing himself to do otherwise. He wrote, “when a person has reached a given stage of unsatisfactory use and functioning, his habit of ‘end-gaining’ will prove to be the impeding factor in all his attempts to profit by any teaching method whatsoever” (*Use* 66). My own observation of myself and my students has been that the thought of singing and “gaining the ends” of sounding beautiful or trying to impress others (whether conscious or subconscious) often creates unnecessary tensions and habits that actually interfere with and derail these very ends. I frequently discuss the pitfalls of end-gaining with my students and we experiment with different ways of overcoming that tendency. Through exploring and learning to stay with the “means whereby,” in other words, singing in simple accord with the principles of the voice with a trustful sense about the outcome, there is always a marked improvement in the results.

Alexander goes into a good deal of detail about the concept of “inhibiting.” He observed that “wrong habitual use of myself . . . came into play as the result of a decision to use my voice . . . my instinctive response (reaction) to the stimulus to use my voice . . . it occurred to me that if, when the stimulus came to me to use my voice, I could inhibit the misdirection . . . I should be stopping off at its source my unsatisfactory reaction to the idea of reciting” (*Use* 38). This concept of inhibiting misdirection has been very powerful and useful in my singing, performing and teaching. At one point in my career, my right foot would often go completely numb when I sang on stage. I began to recognize a tendency to hold an incredible amount of tension in that leg, and through my Alexander work over the years this habit has all but disappeared. I am generally able to quickly notice and inhibit similar tensions throughout my body, replacing them with healthy, coordinated direction.

This statement from *Science and Health* has pointed my work into an even deeper study of these phenomena: “Unless muscles are self-acting at all times, they are never so,—never capable of acting contrary to mental direction. If muscles can cease to act and become rigid of their own preference,—be deformed or symmetrical, as they please or as disease directs,—they must be self-directing” (160). I’ve developed a keen desire and ability to sense the specific fearful or willful thoughts behind unnecessary tensions and to address those thoughts from a spiritual standpoint. Since mind and body are inseparable, getting at the mental cause of poor physical habits has proven more effective and has had a longer lasting impact than just addressing symptoms. Detecting and tackling these causative thoughts is an important part of my teaching practice as well.

It can seem overwhelming to uncover and deal with long-standing habitual thoughts and the resulting physical habits. I have found lots of support and guidance for this often challenging work in Eddy’s writings. “Is a stiff joint or a contracted muscle as much a result of law as the supple and elastic condition of the healthy limb, and is God the lawgiver?” (*S&H* 160-1). I am intrigued by the implications of her pointed question.

A clearer understanding gained through my graduate studies that I don’t have to achieve or “do” something to come into right relation with these physiological principles, but that I can consciously become aware of any habits that would interfere with them and gently “inhibit” these habits has been life-changing. It lines up perfectly with the metaphysical understanding that my relationship to God is already intact and that my main responsibility is to refuse to lose awareness of that fact. Let me talk for a moment about the nature of awareness.

Alexander and Eddy both noted the many ways the physical senses were faulty measures of reality. “Debauched’ was F. M.’s word for describing the unreliability of the senses” (Jones 66). Eddy wrote: “In Science, you can have no power opposed to God,

and the physical senses must give up their false testimony” (S&H 192). She states, “To develop the full might of this Science, the discords of corporeal sense must yield to the harmony of spiritual sense” (S&H vii), and she explains elsewhere, “Spiritual sense is a conscious, constant capacity to understand God” (S&H 209).

So, in my singing practice, I have endeavored to demonstrate this multi-layered understanding that my unbreakable, harmonious relationship to Mind/God can be manifested as a well-aligned, rightly functioning instrument (my body). I have pondered how consciously developing my spiritual sense does not preclude my ability to notice when my physical use is less than optimal. In fact, it likely will enhance it. However, unless I consciously stay present with the awareness of my spiritual nature, any corrections I make in pursuit of healthy physical function ultimately prove ineffective.

In order to apply Alexander’s principles in my teaching practice, I’ve had to develop some strategies not explicitly encompassed in the Technique. Not every student who comes to see me (especially those who come for just 30 minutes a week or who are very young and not so interested in patiently looking at their use) would benefit from discussions about “inhibiting” or “end-gaining” and other concepts that require a fair amount of self-knowledge and reflection. I’ve found there are other ways to help them improve their use and free up primitive, healthy functioning. For older students, we explore how they can think of doing an activity besides singing (maybe something very physical like swinging a tennis racket or something that keeps them engaged like having a focused, passionate conversation) and keep their thoughts on that other activity while they let the singing happen “as a by-product” or pretend that someone else is doing it. I can sometimes ask them to be very still and aware and to work with the idea of inhibiting unwanted physical reactions to the idea of beginning to sing. When they are in the right frame of mind, asking them to look directly at their fears and to begin to unmask them can be a powerful exploration. They are always astounded at what comes

up through this work and often come back to subsequent lessons with new observations about themselves and their habits.

Younger students usually respond well to being asked to do unusual things—which can serve to distract them from end-gaining and enable a freer use. One of my very young piano students was so intent on playing the right notes in her piece that her hand and arm were contorting in the effort. I knew we had to nip that tension in the bud somehow and give her permission to play wrong notes until her individual fingers were moving freely and strongly enough to execute the correct notes without contortion. I drew on a resource I'd been introduced to in my own college piano studies, *Joan Last's Freedom Technique*. I remembered dropping my hands freely onto the keys while letting the wrists fully release downward. I also remembered working with rotating the wrists and other physical gestures meant to unlock tensions and increase a stronger tone. I was grateful to have these ideas to share with 8-year-old Alex. She was delighted to be encouraged to drop her hands onto the keys and play dissonant tone clusters. When we went back to the chords of the piece, she was able to play them accurately with much more freedom.

This and many other examples illustrate that even though I can't necessarily have deep metaphysical conversations with each student or work directly with Alexander's rigorous techniques, my continuing to thoroughly ground myself in these studies does bear a lot of fruit in my practice.

EDUCATION

*“Train up a child in the way he should go:
and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*
Proverbs

Both Alexander and Eddy had strong ideas about and injected new energies into the field of education. Largely self-educated and home schooled by her older brother, a lawyer, Eddy wrote:

Whatever furnishes the semblance of an idea governed by its Principle, furnishes food for thought. Through astronomy, natural history, chemistry, music, mathematics, thought passes naturally from effect back to cause.

Academics of the right sort are requisite. Observation, invention, study, and original thought are expansive and should promote the growth of mortal mind out of itself, out of all that is mortal.

It is the tangled barbarisms of learning which we deplore, — the mere dogma, the speculative theory, the nauseous fiction (*S&H* 195).

On a more metaphysical note she observed, “Mind is not necessarily dependent upon educational processes. It possesses of itself all beauty and poetry, and the power of expressing them. . . We are all capable of more than we do” (*S&H* 89).

Eddy attributed much of humanity’s suffering to the ways individuals were educated to accept the limitations presented by the physical senses. “Ignorant of our God-given rights, we submit to unjust decrees, and the bias of education enforces this slavery” (*S&H* 381). I have found a lot of wisdom in the above passages and I recognize the need for remaining alert to the ways I am being rightly or wrongly educated. I have tried to stay conscious of my God-given rights (which belong equally to every person), including health, freedom from fear, harmony. I’m grateful every day for having been educated into this awareness and for the added depth I feel it has brought to my performing and teaching.

Challenging the materialism of the age, Eddy wrote, “Jesus of Nazareth was the most scientific man that ever trod the globe. He plunged beneath the material surface of things, and found the spiritual cause” (*S&H* 313). “Our Master taught no mere theory, doctrine, or belief. It was the divine Principle of all real being which he taught and practised” (*S&H* 26). These statements have captivated my imagination and feel like a challenge to my own curiosity about the forces at work in my craft. During my graduate studies, I have translated the three systems that cooperate to produce the voice—

respiration, phonation and articulation—into three spiritual intentions: to be inspired, to resonate with truth, and to make things clear. In my own singing and in my work with students, constantly investigating these principles has resulted in a stronger connection to the material being performed and a deeper sense of purpose.

In 1881, Eddy founded the Massachusetts Metaphysical College in Boston where she taught over 4,000 students during the seven years it was open. The Board of Education she established to oversee the training of teachers of Christian Science is still in operation.

Alexander's "ultimate aim" was to "apply his methods to the general education of children" (Bloch 131). In 1916, American philosopher John Dewey was introduced to the technique and became a champion of Alexander's theories. According to Frank Pierce Jones, who studied directly with Alexander and brought a scientific lens to investigating the Technique's implications in the mid 20th century: "John Dewey, who introduced Alexander's work [in the US], said that the discovery was 'as important as any principle that has ever been discovered in the domain of external nature'" (185).

Specifically, Dewey approved of the educational methods Alexander was pioneering. In 1932, Dewey wrote an introduction to Alexander's book *The Use of the Self*, and praised Alexander for his transformative ideas. "The technique of Mr. Alexander . . . contains in my judgment the promise and potentiality of the new direction that is needed in all education" (*Use* 12). Although that statement was written almost 90 years ago, it still rings true and I agree completely with it.

Jones, an experienced educator himself, makes this strong claim:

Because of this common easy assumption that, though there are many imperfections in the world, education at least is on the right track, it is perhaps inevitable that little attention should be paid to anyone who suggests that not only

are educational systems wrong in detail but contemporary education in general is on the wrong track. That is the suggestion that has been made by F.M. Alexander and that is undoubtedly why his writings have been largely neglected. If he had advanced some new method of instruction that could without too much trouble be incorporated into the curriculum he would no doubt, in view of his distinguished backing, have been accepted by educators. Unfortunately there is nothing about his principles that can be assimilated by either progressives or traditionalists; they are revolutionary and will call for a fundamental revision of hypotheses;" (204).

Like Eddy's revolutionary teachings, Alexander's work is still not widely enough known.

Alexander was reluctant to codify his teachings as he knew too well that they could be misunderstood and misrepresented by unenlightened learners. Fortunately, however, there are several organizations that his students have put in place to thoroughly train and certify new Alexander teachers.

CHILDBIRTH

*"Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the Lord:
shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God."
Isaiah*

As someone who has given birth four times, I was interested to read in *Freedom to Change* that Alexander, "long before the talk of 'natural childbirth' and 'childbirth without fear,' had been teaching women how not to interfere with the normal process of gestation and delivery" (59). I never took Lamaze or other childbirth classes, but I successfully drew upon my understanding of the Alexander Technique during each aspect of pregnancy and delivery. The kinesthetic awareness I had developed, the abilities to allow my body to lengthen and widen with the demands of labor and to breathe naturally into delivery served me well.

Likewise, I worked with a Christian Science practitioner before and during all four births which were “natural and safe” (S&H 463). I used no drugs, and three of the four were home births attended by skilled midwives. In the late 19th century, when a safe childbirth was by no means a given, Christian Science established a respected reputation for harmonious deliveries (*jsh.christianscience.com*). Eddy’s statement on the subject in her textbook reads in part: “Teacher and student should also be familiar with the obstetrics taught by this Science. To attend properly the birth of the new child, or divine idea, you should so detach mortal thought from its material conceptions, that the birth will be natural and safe. Though gathering new energy, this idea cannot injure its useful surroundings in the travail of spiritual birth” (463). This was demonstrated fully in my experience.

In addition to finding the subject interesting for its own sake, I mention childbirth in this paper because the physical process of carrying and delivering children places great demands upon the same muscles that govern a singer’s breath. I also recall the way I used my voice during delivery and the coaching from the midwives whose words brought me back to the “whispered ah” exercise I had used in my Alexander work.

HEALING AND MEDICAL RESISTANCE

*“The divine Principle of healing is proved in the personal experience
of any sincere seeker of Truth.”*

Mary Baker Eddy

*“The critics . . . were confused because Alexander was applying a principle of mind-body unity,
to which they all paid lip service, not to philosophy, but to the sphere of everyday living,
where they were not prepared to follow him.”*

Frank Pierce Jones

Both Eddy and Alexander had made discoveries that brought into question many of the medical practices of their day. In their writings, each boldly called out the medical

profession for, in their views, following the wrong track by diagnosing and treating disease while disregarding the underlying mental causes. Eddy wrote:

The medical schools would learn the state of man from matter instead of from Mind. They examine the lungs, tongue, and pulse to ascertain how much harmony, or health, matter is permitting to matter,—how much pain or pleasure, action or stagnation, one form of matter is allowing another form of matter.

Ignorant of the fact that a man's belief produces disease and all its symptoms, the ordinary physician is liable to increase disease with his own mind, when he should address himself to the work of destroying it through the power of the divine Mind (*S&H* 159).

Almost six decades later Alexander stated:

Since the medical curriculum does not include training in the knowledge of how to direct the use of the human mechanisms, the medical man does not bring to his diagnosis an understanding of 'use' in the sense I have defined, and so does not recognize the relationship between misdirection of use and that unsatisfactory standard of functioning which is always found in association with disease; any deductions he may make, therefore, will be based on incomplete premises, and the value of his work limited both in the field of prevention and of cure (*Use* 88).

Not surprisingly, both reformers received considerable resistance from the medical community even while they each healed many cases that had been given up by medical professionals as incurable.

Though he did not claim to have found a "cure" for disease and he considered his work to be "concerned more with education than with treatment" (*Use* 97), Alexander had observed the way improved physical health was a natural outcome of the use of the Technique: "Cases of paralysis, tuberculosis, asthma, 'incipient appendicitis' and colitis

. . . a general improvement in health which brings with it the disappearance of particular disease symptoms. The ‘cures’ were significant because they illustrated a general principle” (Jones 35). This principle, in my experience, is that our natural spiritual and physical state is harmony, expressed in a healthy mind/body, and when we are willing to let go of thoughts (beliefs) and actions that are not in accord with this right function, we can experience well-being and good performance. As Eddy pointed out, Jesus is the ultimate exemplar of this phenomenon. She gives her interpretation of his healing method in this passage: “Jesus beheld in Science the perfect man, who appeared to him where sinning mortal man appears to mortals. In this perfect man the Saviour saw God’s own likeness, and this correct view of man healed the sick” (*S&H* 476-7). Further underscoring that this same healing method is in operation today, she explains our part in it: “The Christlike understanding of scientific being and divine healing includes a perfect Principle and idea,—perfect God and perfect man,—as the basis of thought and demonstration” (*S&H* 259).

In the following passage from *Science and Health* several of the physical effects of Eddy’s healing work paralleled the principles at work in the Alexander Technique—renewal of structure, elongation of limbs, loosening of joints—although Eddy’s treatment eschewed the use of touch which Alexander’s work included. Eddy wrote,

Working out the rules of Science in practice, the author has restored health in cases of both acute and chronic disease in their severest forms. Secretions have been changed, the structure has been renewed, shortened limbs have been elongated, ankylosed joints have been made supple, and carious bones have been restored to healthy conditions. I have restored what is called the lost substance of lungs, and healthy organizations have been established where disease was organic. Christian Science heals organic disease as surely as it heals what is called functional, for it requires only a fuller understanding of the divine Principle of Christian Science to demonstrate the higher rule (162).

John Dewey wrote in an article entitled “A Sick World” of “our preference for a seemingly cheap and easy way of dealing with symptoms, of our wish to be cured rather than to be well. . . Only education and re-education into normal conditions of growth accomplishes anything positive and enduring” (Jones 36). I concur with him completely. This re-education is central to my own practice.

PROOF OF UTILITY

“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Jesus

At the heart of the lives of these two thinkers was a robust personal practice of their theories. Both Eddy and Alexander were noted to be mentally sharp as well as relatively spry virtually until their passing after long productive lives—Eddy at age 89 and Alexander at 86. At age 78, Alexander suffered a “stroke which had almost killed him . . . and his recovery was remarkable. . . A year after he had been struck down, there was little to show that he had undergone the experience . . .” (Bloch 231).

A *New York Herald* reporter interviewed an 80-year-old Eddy in 1901 at her home in Concord, New Hampshire, and observed, “Seated in the large parlor, I became aware of a white-haired lady slowly descending the stairs. She entered with a gracious smile, walking uprightly and with light step, and after a kindly greeting took a seat on a sofa. It was Mrs. Eddy. . . Older in years, white-haired and frailer . . . when I say frail, let it not be understood that I mean weak, for weak she was not” (*The First Church* 342).

Many thousands of authenticated accounts of healing accomplished by Eddy and by those who have practiced the teachings of Christian Science to this day have been published—beginning with the final 100 pages of *Science and Health*. Likewise, the

transformative impact on students of the Alexander Technique since its introduction is well-documented.

LEAVENING OF THOUGHT

*“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took,
and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”*

Jesus

Christian Science and the Alexander Technique have both had a wide reaching impact on world thought. Eddy, whose textbook has sold more than 10 million copies since its publication, wrote in reference to Jesus’ simile, “Like the leaven that a certain woman hid in three measures of meal, the Science of God and the spiritual idea, named in this century Christian Science, is leavening the lump of human thought, until the whole shall be leavened and all materialism disappear” (*Miscellaneous Writings* 166). In her textbook, she identified “Science, Theology, and Medicine” as the “means of divine thought” that were being leavened (*S&H* 118).

Bloch traces the ways Alexander’s work has influenced countless contemporary thinkers, scientists, and politicians, such as John Dewey, George Ellett Coghill, Rudolf Magnus, Aldous Huxley, Gurdjieff, and Feldenkreis among many others. Today the Alexander Technique is known fairly widely and is practiced by dancers, musicians, singers and actors as well as the general public. Many arts training institutions and universities have established branches of Alexander study.

Far from being just a way for performing artists to gain a little more freedom in their movement, Alexander’s methods present a kind of gateway to a potentially more highly functioning world consciousness. As Jones analogizes, “Most people are caught in monkey traps of unconscious habit. They cannot escape because they do not perceive what they are doing while they are doing it. . . The Alexander Technique opens a window onto the little-known area between stimulus and response . . .” (4). Dewey made the dire but sadly prescient observation,

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 . . . then the more complex the social conditions under which we live, the more disastrous must be the outcomes (*Use* Introduction 11).

Alexander himself also recognized the immensity of the task at hand: “The idea of taking control of the use of the mechanisms of the human creature from the instinctive on to the conscious plane has already been justified by the results which have been obtained by applying it in practice, but it may be many years before its true significance as a factor in human development is fully recognized” (*Use* 41).

Likewise, Eddy understood that the world needed time to process her revolutionary teachings, but she remained hopeful throughout her life. Alongside a marginal heading “Full fruitage yet to come,” she wrote in *Science and Health*: “I have never supposed the world would immediately witness the full fruitage of Christian Science, or that sin, disease, and death would not be believed for an indefinite time; but this I do aver, that, as a result of teaching Christian Science, ethics and temperance have received an impulse, health has been restored, and longevity increased. If such are the present fruits, what will the harvest be, when this Science is more generally understood?” (348).

CONCLUSION

“Take possession of your body, and govern its feeling and action.”
Mary Baker Eddy

The principles taught and practiced by Eddy and Alexander are scientific, and as such they are provable and effective, as I have demonstrated in my own experience. My belief is that, as they are more widely understood and practiced, they will continue to transform individual consciousness throughout wider and wider spheres. My hope is that thought will open to the truth of these principles sooner than later. As I see it, my

part in this process is to learn more about and to more fully live these principles as well as I can and let them bear fruit in my life and work.

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