

Sir George Trevelyan: thoughts and writings

Prototypes of Holistic Achievement

about Rudolf Steiner and Matthias Alexander

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WE ARE CONCERNED with the breakthrough to a holistic world-view. We have seen that this is far more than theory. Once it takes possession of us, it brings change in character. We must change. We can no longer go on with the same egoism that characterises the condition of separation. We enter a new epoch, the evolutionary age when human consciousness lifts and expands into an experience of Wholeness.

At the beginning of every epoch certain individuals emerge who have taken the step into the new consciousness. We must think that these are souls who have incarnated in order to lift mankind another step up the ladder – Jacob's ladder. In the Renaissance, Leonardo and Michelangelo were such people. I wish now to speak of two men who appear to have, through their own vision and activity, actually changed themselves and shown the way for others to do the same. These are Rudolf Steiner and F. Matthias Alexander. Each of these in his own way actually brought about in himself an evolutionary transformation of immense significance for the holistic vision and its application to living. It is of course impossible to do justice to the work of such men in one chapter, but since their thinking and its application has been a major factor in my life, I should like to acknowledge and do honour to them in this book.

RUDOLF STEINER (1864-1924)

Steiner's work in researching into the spiritual worlds is of astonishing depth. I am simply concerned here with his approach to thinking as a demonstration of holism.

Indeed, it is highly significant that before he launched out on his teachings about the spiritual nature of man and the universe, he wrote *The Philosophy of Freedom*

and A Theory of Knowledge about the nature of thinking, to show that his research was by no means the result of mediumship or of higher beings speaking through his consciousness. He wished to establish that he had lifted his thinking beyond the limitations of sense-bound intellect and had in fullest consciousness achieved a oneness with the ocean of Mind, the living Intelligence of the Universe. All his teaching was the expression of direct experience of the spiritual worlds. He was simply describing what he saw and found in these higher worlds and putting it into thoughts for us to understand.

He needed to establish that he had done something with his thinking which had never been achieved before and that his researches into the spiritual worlds had the same validity as scientific exploration of the material plane.

He was born in Austria in 1864 with complete clairvoyance, and the spiritual worlds were fully open to him. As an absolutely first rate scientific mind, teaching the most advanced theories of his time, he saw that his spiritual knowledge was a kind of atavistic throwback into a quite outdated form of thinking, unfitting for a scientific age. Yet this capacity gave him complete certainty about the reality of the spiritual worlds. He wrote of himself:

The spiritual world stood self-evident to me. But I felt that it was essential for me to enter it through the doorway of nature. I urged upon myself: "I must intensify my thinking. I must become able with my thinking to penetrate into the reality within natural phenomena. Only in such a way can I legitimately enter the spiritual world."

He saw that the way evolution had taken humanity, had led to illusion about the material worlds. Our intellectual thinking was based on perceptions through the senses, which were not tuned to apprehend the living being within the forms of nature. He knew by direct vision that these forms were the creation of a world of being, of living ideas which are strands of the ocean of Divine thinking.

Thus he saw that if he could achieve "sense-free thinking", he would be able to unite directly with this world of Being. The way through was clearly by an intense meditative study of nature in her metamorphosis of forms, so that his own thinking could in itself apprehend the thinking of the Universe. If the human ego is a droplet of the Divine mind, then surely this droplet can unite with the ocean of Divine thinking and idea. Thinking thus became the way of research into the higher worlds.

In this sense man himself holds the key to the secrets of nature. In such concentrated meditation, human thinking is brought into awareness of the creative activity of Thought that lies behind the world of nature.

Once he had made his breakthrough by intensifying his thinking to the point of "sense-free thinking", there was no limit to the possibility of research. He knew he had refuted Kant and demonstrated that in very truth there were no limits to

human knowledge.

His teaching life of a quarter of a century in which he gave six thousand lectures, was a demonstration of the human potential of thinking as an instrument of knowledge. Whenever he was asked to speak on a subject, he responded by demonstrating that he could draw knowledge direct from source in fullest consciousness. We are not concerned here to speak of the colossal achievement in sheer work and inspiration. The point I wish to make is that here is a human being who took his own thinking and used it as an instrument for breakthrough into Higher Thinking. He saw that no one before had in this sense considered "thinking about thinking".

The point where ideas bubble into consciousness is, for each of us, unique in the universe. It is the only point where we are, at one and the same time, both creator and observer. The ideas are ours – and yet they are given from an inner, higher source. They bubble up like a fountain of Thoughts, which we can observe. The brain is formed by Thought to reflect the convolutions of Cosmic Thought. My eye cannot see its own seeing, nor my ear hear its hearing, but I can think about thinking. In this humanity is unique, and here we have the clue that opens to us the possibility of exploring the infinite realms of knowledge.

Humanity stands at this threshold. Holistic thinking can grasp this vision. There have of course been seers and initiates in all ages, but Steiner is probably the first to take the conscious step in intensifying his own thinking so that in a clear and scientific manner he could enter the realms of spirit, merging thinking with the Cosmic Intelligence.

Here is an important statement in his autobiography.

If we see in thinking the capacity to comprehend more than can be known to the senses, we are forced on to recognize the existence of objects over and above those we experience in sense perception. Such objects are Ideas. In taking possession of the Idea, thinking merges itself into the World Mind. What was working without now works within. Man has become one with the World Being at its highest potency. Such a becoming-realized of the Idea is the true communion of man. Thinking has the same significance for ideas as the eye for light and the ear for sound. It is an organ of perception.

Thus I submit that here is a human achievement of paramount significance for holistic thinking. A new human species is emerging and Steiner stands as a prototype. We can all follow this lead. In living Thinking lies the key to initiation into higher knowledge, through Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition.

F. MATTHIAS ALEXANDER

Matthias Alexander is another who demonstrated holism, but in a different way. He was not concerned with the spiritual world-view. His discovery concerns the use of the self, the manner in which we direct the way we are using the body as a psycho-physical unity. This achievement started not as a theory but in the tackling of a very practical situation. As a Shakespearean reciter in Australia, he found that his career was threatened through loss of voice. No expert could tell him why this was happening. He then grasped the idea that this defect must be caused by something he was doing himself to put the mechanism wrong. Since no one could throw light on this, he got mirrors and watched himself reciting. He soon saw that the greater the effort he put into speaking the more he stiffened his neck and pulled his head back and down, which obviously crushed larynx and the speaking organs. Further that he was dragging his body down, shortening the spine. When he tried to lengthen, he found he dragged the back in, which narrowed the whole rib cage and lung area.

But when he came to apply this discovery, he was completely defeated. Every time he began reciting the same thing happened, because his general habit of use of the whole body had come to feel right. He saw that, if the wrong use of himself felt right, then the right use of the body mechanism would of course feel wrong. He saw clearly that we all rely on the guidance of our feeling, our sensory mechanism, to tell us what we are doing with ourselves. If that kinaesthetic register has become untrustworthy, how can we possibly bring about habit changes in use of ourselves? No one is going to do the thing that feels positively wrong. He was in despair. He knew what he had to do. He had to relax and untense neck and throat, allow the head to go forward and upward instead of dragging it back and down, and thereby maintain the lengthening of the spine rather than shortening it.

This general use of the body mechanism treated as a whole, would obviously keep the pressure off the larynx and enable him to recite without the harmful tension. But could he do it? Every time he began to recite he found that he followed the guidance of his faulty feeling and reverted to the dragging back of the head and shortening of the spine, because it had come to feel right. Then he made his great discovery. It was so simple, so logical and so very difficult to achieve. Yet here is the holistic clue to taking conscious, constructive control of the use of the body mechanism on which we are dependent in every single thing we do.

He knew that he had found the true and primary movement for each and every act. He came to call it the "primary control". He recognized the holistic nature of the human body, a wonderful instrument which dearly we are constantly misusing because our feeling register becomes untrustworthy. He soon saw in watching himself and others that the tendency was always to stiffen the neck muscles and drag the head backward when effort was made. How often is this apparent in runners straining for the goal. It followed that every attempt at physical training or exercise which did not recognize this primary relationship of

parts – head to neck, and head and neck to back as a combined use – would result in loss of coordination of the whole body.

He then made the further discovery, on which the technique was to turn. Whenever I give consent to do something, I tend to stiffen neck and pull head back without knowing I am doing it. I cannot bring about a different use of myself because what is right feels wrong, through habit. Therefore I must learn, when I receive a stimulus, to withhold reaction, to say NO to the immediate response. Then I must project a conscious order to my neck to relax and my head to continue in a poised, forward and up direction. Clearly I don't need to do anything in order to undo tension. It is simply a question of giving an order, sending a mental direction to the neck to relax etc. If the wrong habit comes in every time I try to gain my end, I must obviously cease to be concerned about that end and instead must concentrate on the means whereby I can achieve that end. I must take control by refusing to allow the faulty sensory register to get into action. I must cut out 'end-gaining'.

Once he had mastered this principle and technique he found that the trouble of loss of voice was overcome. He had learned the secret of maintaining co-ordination of the body mechanism, treated as a working whole. The use of the self obviously applied to every action in living. So he devoted the rest of his life to teaching this technique. It is now accepted as an essential factor in the emergence of alternative therapies and life-style.

I want to quote from my diary of 1931 when I first took up Alexander's work and joined the first training course for teachers, in London:

I went first to see Alexander as an undergraduate at Cambridge. He looked at me, felt me with his hands and said "Young man, what have you been doing to yourself?" He made me make some movements as in fencing, a sport in which I indulged a great deal and with much skill. To my surprise he raised his hands in horror. Then he expounded – I was using myself abominably; I had cultivated unconscious habits which felt quite right but in fact were pulling my poor body out of shape. I was stiffening my neck and pulling my head back; I had got my back pulled right in and it had fixed there as if the framework of the lung was battered in. I was doing these things myself. I was doing them. I myself was positively pulling my body out of shape. Each time I lunged in fencing, in went the back and back came the head. Clearly, the more I did the worse the conditions would become. If in walking I pulled my head back, what must I be doing in the violent efforts of mountaineering! It was suddenly clear as day. Somehow one must stop doing those things which pulled one out of shape to allow the misplaced structures to fall back into their normal conditions. Here was an idea and a principle diametrically opposed to every exercise or training I had ever heard of. The first lesson was a revelation!...

I became quite clear that this technique held something of immense importance

for mankind and that I must learn it and be able to teach it. I knew that this was one of the great discoveries. Alexander called his first book *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, his second, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, the third, *The Use of the Self* (probably the most useful for study) and the last, *The Universal Constant in Living*.

Those who have engaged in meditation and have also been trained in the Alexander technique will have seen that there is a close parallel. The Tibetan Lamas claim the capacity to continue meditation in all they are doing. When we have achieved the poise of Alexander's 'primary control', we can maintain it while giving consent to the limbs doing whatever we want. This has the closest relation to sustained meditation. Non-attachment to 'end-gaining' and control of reaction through 'inhibition' of immediate response to stimuli until directions for the primary control are given, is indeed a kind of western yoga. The act of refusing to respond to the primary desire to gain an end becomes the act of responding to the conscious reasoned desire to employ the means whereby the end may be gained. Clearly and obviously this touches everything we do. Here is the clue for breaking habit and lifting into the new. It would have wonderful effect if it could be included as an essential feature in teaching the 'inner game' of skiing, tennis and athletics. It is as basic to real therapy and healthy living as is nutrition through whole and organic food.

I submit that Alexander demonstrated a principle of supreme importance for a holistic world-view. He made a breakthrough which is nothing less than an evolutionary step forward, when a single human being learned to take constructive, conscious control of the direction of his own use of himself. He discovered man's supreme inheritance and the universal constant in living. He overcame the reliance on faulty sensory register and taught himself a central general habit of use of his entire body working as an indivisible psycho-physical unity.

What seems now to be emerging is a type of human being who is using conscious direction of him/herself. This implies the concept that the body is a potentially perfect tool or instrument for carrying out the purposes of the soul. These two men, Steiner and Alexander, have each in their own way done something which has not been achieved before. They have taken a conscious step in evolution, a step which others will be able to follow. They offer a prototype experience directly relevant to holistic thinking.

Steiner demonstrated the possibility of intensifying thinking so as to blend with the ocean of Mind and explore the super-sensible worlds with scientific certainty. Alexander demonstrated how the use of the psycho-physical self can be mastered and maintained, and faulty habit patterns consciously changed.

Steiner showed us how sense-bound thinking leads to illusion and limitation. Alexander revealed that reliance on faulty sensory appreciation will inevitably

lead to faulty co-ordination of the whole body and therefore bring about ill-health and impaired functioning.

With our present understanding of reincarnation and the concept of the Earth as training ground for the evolving soul, we can accept that working on the self in these ways will carry its results through from one life to the next. We approach the realization of the archetype which stands before us as the goal, the reality in the Mind of God. Each incarnation will bring us nearer to the achieving of Homo Erectus.