

NO 27a RAYMOND DART (III)

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1. The last couple of talks have been about Raymond Dart (1893-1988). We looked at his career as a paleoanthropologist and a distinguished academic in South Africa. We looked at his struggles to deal with the problems of his prematurely-born son Galen, his belief in recapitulation theory, his involvement with the AT, and how the Dart Procedures emerged.
2. In his later years he was a highly respected academic and received many scientific honours. Two years before his retirement, *The Institute for the Study of Man in Africa* was established in his honour in the University of Witwatersrand.
3. After Dart retired from Witwatersrand in 1958 he still had thirty years to live. He became involved with an organisation in Pennsylvania called the *Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential*.
4. I was curious to find out if he had used his AT experience in his this new setting so I had a look at what the *Institutes* is about.
5. It was set up in 1960 by a physiotherapist called Glenn Doman, and an educational psychologist called Carl Delacato with the purpose of helping brain-damaged children. They had been inspired by Temple Fay a Philadelphia neurosurgeon (1895-1963) who was a firm believer in recapitulation theory.
6. Fay had made a special study of and Dart said:

To him, in particular, the involuntary movements of patients during seizures or epileptic fits were simply exhibiting ancestral and beneficial movement patterns reminiscent of piscine, amphibian or reptilian antiquity.¹
7. Fay believed that by learning from these movements it would be possible to prevent or eliminate the lack of bodily control displayed in epilepsy.
8. Doman and Delacato began working on these ideas at a rehabilitation centre in Philadelphia in 1955 and this grew into the *Institutes* which they set up in 1960 with the purpose of helping brain-damaged children by using the ideas of Temple Fay.
9. In particular, they developed a technique they called “patterning” based on recapitulation theory that involves taking

¹ Dart (1996) p28

the children through the movements supposedly characteristic of the phylogenetic stages they were assumed to have missed. From what I can gather from their website, at least some of these are closely similar to what we know as the Dart Procedures.

10. They claimed to be able to treat autism, cerebral palsy and various kinds of brain damage using this approach. When Dart learned of their work, he wrote approvingly to them saying

*The development of the individual does indeed recapitulate the evolution of the species. More power to you and your work.*²

11. He remained in contact with Doman and Delacato and in 1966, they offered him a professorship of Anthropology at the Institutes which he accepted.

12. Dart and his wife thought deeply about taking up this offer. He had been retired for eight years and it was a big commitment. But he took it because he felt the Institutes was a worthy cause as well as giving some hope of being able to help Galen.³

13. The chair was paid for by the United Union of Steelworkers which pleased Dart greatly and he became a member of the Union and wore his membership badge in his lapel.

14. His biographers said of his work at the *Institutes* that he:

*...gave over his valuable services to lecturing and advising on brain damage in children and steel workers, contributing from his vast knowledge accumulated over a lifetime of studying brain development both in animals and in man.*⁴

15. The *Institutes* are still in business. They still offer their patterning which remains controversial. A review in the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics in 1999 says

*This treatment is based on an outmoded and oversimplified theory of brain development. Current information does not support the claims of proponents that this treatment is efficacious, and its use continues to be unwarranted.*⁵

² Wheelhouse and Smithford (2001)p275 c

³ Ibid.p276

⁴ Ibid.p277

⁵ <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/104/5/1149.full>

16. Looking at their website, they also sell books to parents who are very keen on pushing their children ahead. They have titles like *Teach your baby to read; How to teach your baby math; How to multiply your baby's intelligence; How to give your baby encyclopedic knowledge; How to multiply your baby's intelligence.*
17. But there is no trace of any AT influence that I have been able to find.
18. As Dart grew older, his eyesight began to fail and in 1983, when he was ninety one, it was almost completely gone. He spent his last years in a retirement village and died in 1988 at the age of ninety-five.
19. Taking a broad overview of Dart, his training was as a medical doctor, an anatomist, and a paleoanthropologist.. From the depth and breadth of his scientific background, and his own experience of the AT, he was probably the best qualified scientific observer to have looked at the AT.
20. Thanks to Alex Murray we have a substantial body of Dart's writings on the AT. It was his persistence and hard work over a long period that led to the publication by STAT of the book *Skill and poise* in 1996 which has six papers by Dart.
21. His most comprehensive paper on the Technique was his 1970 Alexander Memorial Lecture. Walter Carrington was in the chair and Irene Tasker who had given Dart his first lessons in the Technique in 1943 was in the audience.
22. The Memorial Lecture is far too long to have been given as a lecture in its entirety and Dart says people may read it at their leisure. He obviously intended it as a record for Alexander teachers of his considered views on the Technique after nearly thirty years of thinking about it and putting it into practice in his own life.
23. The lecture covers a wide range of topics. In the introduction, Dart showed a very modest attitude to his knowledge of the AT. He said that Walter Carrington had had twenty years of personal contact with Alexander, whereas he, Dart, had had 35 minutes.
24. He then reflects on just how radical Alexander's ideas were when his first book *Man's supreme inheritance* was published in 1910. Bodily matters could not be discussed in mixed company and there was a rigid separation between mind and body in the medical profession.

25. Yet Alexander was challenging some of these most basic attitudes which is one of the reasons that made his work so attractive to progressive thinkers like Dewey. Alexander's insistence on approaching people as "*psychophysical organisms*" was particularly important because it was a radical break with the mind-body separation.
 26. The tragedy, even today, is the extent to which this kind of thinking still remains outside the mainstream. It would not occur to most psychotherapists that their patient's way of carrying themselves might be related to their psychological problems.
 27. Dart then provides a long anatomy lesson in a section he calls *Basic facts about cranial phylogeny and body movements*. This is an account of the evolutionary or phylogenic development of human physiology.
- He also has a section called *How any intelligent individual can study his or her own self*. Basically, this is about putting oneself into a prone or semi-supine or others of the positions in the Dart Procedures every day and using gentle movements to explore oneself. Dart also emphasises the value of making notes about what is discovered. This is a version of what we call "working on oneself".
28. Then there are three papers that Dart wrote in the immediate aftermath of his discovery of the Technique.
 29. The one of most interest to us is called *Voluntary musculature of the human body: the double-spiral arrangement*. This is the origin of the spirals group which was developed by Dilys Carrington which many of us remember.
 30. Here again Dart is keen to demonstrate the evolutionary development of the human musculature and how it has led to the way in which layers of muscle spiral round the body in opposite directions. This spiral pattern is most obvious in the torso but is also found in the neck and arms and legs.
 31. Leaving out the evolutionary aspects, the fact of this spiral arrangement of the muscular anatomy is crucially important to how we use and misuse ourselves but is rarely given any attention outside AT circles. The point is that when we flex the body, we do not just bend it forward and backwards. Virtually everything we do when we walk, run, brush our teeth or whatever, involves a greater or element of twisting or spiral movement throughout the body

32. There is more technical detail in this paper than most of us need but I think the basic message is important. Dart points out that:

The majority of people – as a result of their single handedness and their fixed and sedentary occupations, to say nothing of their food and clothing – suffer from mild, moderate and even serious grades of permanent postural twist, although the condition has not been recognized by themselves or their medical advisors.⁶

33. He goes on to say:

In the members of my family and in myself, the ‘Undoing’ of previously leftward twists, whether congenital or acquired, has been a major preoccupation of the past seven years. That employment has led me to recognize and to correlate many facts about the body and its functioning both as a whole and in parts, which had previously eluded my notice. Amongst those anatomical facts, the double-spiral arrangement of the voluntary musculature is basic.⁷

34. Another highly technical paper in *Skill and Poise* is called *The postural aspect of malocclusion*. Malocclusion is when the upper and lower sets of teeth do not fit together in the way they should. In some cases the upper teeth are too far forward; in other cases, the lower teeth are pushed forward; or there may be other distortions in the bite.

35. A lot of this paper is addressed directly to the dental profession of his day. I cannot say how it relates to what dentists think nowadays. I know my own dentist did not pay much attention to the copy of the paper I gave him.

36. I suspect most dentists would not be receptive to Dart’s proposition that

...malocclusion in Man is primarily a postural defect.⁸

37. This could be taken to mean that rather than getting braces on your teeth, you should have AT lessons. While I would hesitate to go that far, the relationship between the bite and posture is surprisingly close. We all know from the “games” and the voice work in the training course how important it is to

⁶ Dart (1996) pp71

⁷ Ibid.7p1

⁸ Ibid.p74

be able to let the jaw muscles release – and how this affects the way we stand and hold ourselves.

38. He also makes an important point about posture in the broad sense of how we hold and use ourselves. He talks of the forebrain, the thinking part, and says

The forebrain is neither an initiator nor regulator of posture; it follows immediate objectives as consciousness of them awakens, and employs the apparatus of movement momentarily at its disposal, whatever the postural development of the apparatus may be.

39. In other words, we use what we have. He goes on to say:

When the postural development of the individual is such as to place at the forebrain's disposal a perfectly poised apparatus, the conscious and subconscious aspects of movement are happily integrated. Unfortunately, conscious objectives so outstrip postural evolution as to produce bodily disharmony more frequently than body poise.⁹

40. So when we have got into bad habits of standing or sitting 2

... steps should be taken to train or educate the respective parts to undertake their proper relative roles in body support in the posture under consideration. This training, however, is not so much a training to do good movements as a restraining of the individual from performing improper and inappropriate movements by means of manipulative and personal inhibition.¹⁰

41. The third of the three early papers that Dart wrote on the Technique is called *The attainment of poise* and was published in 1947.

42. We all know how problematic the word posture can be and the way people stiffen themselves up when you say you are an Alexander teacher. Dart provides a useful distinction between posture which tends to imply a fixed position and what he calls “poise”. He says:

Poise is a body state achieved only by steady and carefree education of the body and the maintenance of balance. Poise is a character of repose or rest in the

⁹ Ibid.p85

¹⁰ Ibid.p98

*good body, whether it is in the relatively static positions of lying, sitting, or standing or is actually in progressive motion during the activities of life's daily routine or of sport.*¹¹

43. Much of the rest of the paper is about using the bodily configurations described in the Dart Procedures to adjust the body in ways which will bring about the attainment of poise.
44. I can see the point in using particular positions to explore balance and the way we use ourselves. But the fact that a movement or a posture mimics one characteristic of a remote vertebrate ancestor as it evolved from being amphibian to land-based animal is no guarantee that it is useful to someone with a bad back.
45. I think there is a danger here, particularly in what Dart says about pain. He talks about adopting
- ...an objective attitude towards pain, using the term in its widest connotation, to embrace all the curious subjective forms of unpleasant sensation, e.g. tingling, tickling, prickling, stabbing, throbbing, bursting, numbing, leaden, dull or wooden, which become manifest during these periods devoted to the process of attaining poise by postural adaptation.*¹²
46. He goes on to say that postural procedures of this kind
- ...enable the malpostured individual in positions of security to study at leisure and understand by postural experience the biological purpose of his pain symptomatology.*¹³
47. One can see what he is getting at but we live in a culture which has embraced the idea that without pain there is no gain. The scope for getting it wrong and believing that because certain Dart Procedures are uncomfortable or painful they must be doing good is obvious.
48. So, to sum up on Raymond Dart. He had limited – though pretty high-quality – experience of the Technique as a pupil. He had read Alexander's books and been deeply impressed by them. He took the ideas he had gained from this reading, his anatomy, his paleoanthropology, his working with his son Galen, and his own native intelligence, and wove them all

¹¹ Ibid.p114

¹² Ibid.p136

¹³ Ibid.p136

together into his own particular view of how we should learn to use ourselves.

49. His involvement with recapitulation theory looks to me like a seriously wrong turning. I have read his papers many times and my general feeling is that there is rather less in them than first meets the eye.

50. His successor at Witwatersrand University, Professor Philip Tobias put it nicely when he described Dart as

*an animated and very personable figure, one who was warm and inspirational, yet subject to very human caprice, frailty and fallibility.*¹⁴

51. That is a scientific way of saying he got a lot wrong. As for us, our overall verdict on Dart is certainly positive. We should treat him with affectionate respect but also a certain amount of gentle scepticism.

REFERENCES

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¹⁴ Wheelhouse and Smithford (2001)pix