

The Three Dimensions of Use

By Ron Dennis

The purposes of this article are 1) generally to clarify the concept of Use as it has come down to us, and 2) particularly to give full access to the term "posturality" as equivalent to Use when speaking about the Technique, especially to the public. By "full access" is meant our ability to employ "posturality" without mental reservation as to whether it expresses the whole content of Use—it doesn't—but, in so doing, also to be aware of that whole content, and further, to be using a part of it consciously as a practical communicative expedient, call it "public relations and/or marketing" if you will. By way of preview, the other two legs of the conceptual stool of Use are "actionality" and "ethicality"—more of those anon—and together these three comprise an understanding of Use as a comprehensive psycho-physical unity in thought and action.

Elsewhere I've argued that Use, despite its elegance and sufficiency as a concept, has not successfully proclaimed the domain of Alexander's technique because of its being a technical, esoteric, and generally unfamiliar term in the field of posture and movement.^{1,2} There, I gave the origin, meaning, and significance of my original term Posturality, before which we had no concept for referring directly to the *quality* of posture, the suffix "ity" referring, according to Webster, to "the state or quality of something," as in "personality," "mentality," "physicality." Also I've defined "posture" as "the flow through space and time of all activity of bodily support and movement in the course of living."³ This definition was necessary in order to give a movement dimension to posture, typically thought of statically in terms of position. It is clear from FMA's writing that he considered his work primarily relevant in terms of the postural aspect of Use, considered in its true sense of movement through time,⁴ which is why I advocate "posturality" as a more readily understandable usage for public consumption.

A requirement of conceptual parallelism makes necessary the "qualitization" of the other dimensions of Use, the first of which—in arbitrary order—I call "Actionality," the *quality* of action. "Action" as used in movement studies refers to voluntary and goal-directed movements, as contrasted with random or reflex movements. For example, sitting down in a chair is an action, while reflex blinking is a movement, as also would be instances of movement during full sleep. Another way to say it is that all actions involve movements but not all movements are actions. So to what am I referring as the "quality" of action? Surely not as to whether the action accomplishes its purpose, however significant; that's more a matter of quantity than of quality—indeed, the action is successful to some degree or it's not, relative to its end, hardly a qualitative distinction.

Rather, it is in *how* the action is performed that it is assessable in terms of its quality, and the essence of that *how* is notably contained, if somewhat awkwardly expressed, in FMA's dichotomous conception of "end-gaining" vs. "means-whereby." For, as we Alexandrians all know, everyone can "sit down" to a chair successfully in terms of getting there, but relatively few can do it without some degree of structural compromise, as well as in standing, walking, bending, and the other common actions of daily life. For these actions to be carried out not only successfully—accomplishing their ends—but also not "strainfully" ("stress" being the price of living, "strain" when the price is too high), due attention must be given to the requisite process, desirably through experience with one of us. The concept of Actionality thus captures the matter of quality in the teleological (ends) and organizational (means) aspects of Use, just as Posturality does in the structural and executional ones.

The foregoing is not to say that *all* ends are justified *only* in terms of their means (please dodge a careening skateboarder or other danger by any means possible), but rather that the intelligent *co-evaluation* of means and ends ongoingly and rigorously is a desirable outcome of Alexander study (or any other) on a societal as well as a on a personal basis. The fact that the word "actionality" already exists, if rather forlornly in meaning—"relating to action or an action"—is all the more reason, for our own understanding, to imbue it with the rich significance suggested here.

Also in "The Posturality of the Person," I raised the issue of an implicit morality—here called Ethicality—in Use: "For to use something at all—certainly the Self—implies not only the manner of this use but also its purpose, always subject as voluntary action to moral judgment." While it is true enough that many—if not most—of one's daily actions are ethically neutral, both in individual and societal impact, they certainly are not always so relative to the individual's health, well-being, and productivity. And surely certain of one's actions can be impactful socially—for better or worse—regardless of the manner of Use in implementing them. Thus we may plausibly speak of one's "use ethic," comparable to one's "work," "play," or other, ethic. The quality of all these ethics—their Ethicality—would seem to be a function of the degree and manner in which they partake of the aspects both of ends-and-means as in Actionality as well as of individual-and-society as in Ethicality.

And so we arrive at the fractionated paradox of all unities as dissected verbally and analytically—in the present case, of Use, which we may yet "think," familiarly, "one after the other and all together": Posturality, Actionality, Ethicality. Surely we now can appreciate all the more Alexander's words, "Talk about a man's individuality and character: it's the way he uses himself."

¹ "The Posturality of the Person," *AmSAT Journal* No.2, Fall 2012

² Even conservative STAT has acknowledged that the Technique's traditional language may need revision (*STATNEWS* Vol. 9 Issue 11 September 2018): "The secret is to first talk about the AT and what you do in relationship to things people understand. People do not come to us for the AT principles, but for us to help them. And the way we will present that will make all the difference."

³ "Posture, Postural Education, and the Alexander Technique," *AmSAT News* No. 81, Winter 2009.

⁴ "The Posturality of the Person," Note 2.