

The Elusive Obvious: The Convergence of Movement, Neuroplasticity, and Health

by Moshe Feldenkrais (Author), Norman Doidge M.D. (Foreword) **Paperback – April 23 2019**

On the Elusive Obvious from <https://feldynotebook.com/on-the-elusive-obvious/>

Introduction

This page is dedicated to Moshe's book *The Elusive Obvious*. Feel free to share any information or insights you might have about the book.

Notes by Adam Cole

- Pg. 3 – *The Feldenkrais Method* is practical application of Schrödinger, Erickson, etc. *They* don't even know the practical application of their work!
- Pg. 9 – Feldenkrais considers himself to be dancing with his clients, rather than working with them. <Dalcroze actually danced with them!>
- Pg. 14 – Beginning of the idea of importance of movement: "Cessation of movement is the end of life."
- Pg. 16 – *How* rather than *what* we do.
- Pg. 19 – The example of the upside down glasses as an illustration of confirmation of Poincaré's implications (as per his assertions in his book, *Science and Hypothesis*, that movement of the head and body is involved in our perception of space in three dimensions, and our choice of Euclidian geometry) that function is not located in the organ, but in the use of the organ.
- Pg. 20 – So moving as babies helps us to see. <How might this apply to sight-singing? By moving Dalcoze-style, we improve our capacity as sight-singers>
- Pg. 25 – Our tendency/necessity to *create order* or *find order* / <Music is a proactive adaptive version of this>
- Pg. 34 – The Margaret Mead skipping story.

- Pg. 35-36 – The importance of choice / how to get more than “acting” and “not acting.”
- Pg. 42 – Equilibrium of large systems (like the human body) “In dynamic equilibrium, the question is not standing or falling but how large is the shock that the system can receive before recovery of development becomes impossible. The greater the number of smaller systems that make up the large one, the greater is the likelihood of recovery and survival.”
- Pg. 43 – Feldenkrais’ definition of “good posture” – “Human posture, in spite of the implications of the static ‘posting,’ is a dynamic equilibrium. A posture is good if it can regain equilibrium after a large disturbance... Human upright standing, loosely referred to as posture, is not governed by the laws of static equilibrium.”
- Pg. 45 – “Inhibition of one part of the motor cortex can alter the neighboring symmetrical point even to excitation or reduce its inhibition.” In other words, working on one side can affect the other side.
- Pg. 47 – Posture as the position of immobility through which the dynamic object/ person moves from one position to another. Likened to a pendulum at its resting place, but inverted in a person.
- Pg. 83 – Feldenkrais’ speculation on a first connection between the *ear*, the *eyes*, and posture: “I believe that the otolithic apparatus of the ear – tiny whiskers with little stones at their ends which produce maximum impulses when truly vertical – fixes the head so that the eyes can see the horizon most comfortably.” Feldenkrais speculates that during the period before birth at which the baby is head-down, this is actually an opportunity for the otolithic mechanism to “zero out” the way an electrical measuring apparatus is set to zero to make accurate measurements later. He also speculates that babies that have an insufficient period of this “otolithic standardization” may experience difficulty in finding effective posture. <Dalcroze work connects the ear, the eyes and posture too, through the function of listening to music and responding to it. Could this allow for a resetting of the otolithic apparatus?>
- Pg. 91 “In life an act must be accomplished at the right speed, at the right moment, and with the right vigor. Failure in any of these conditions will compromise the act and make it fail... Yet, all these conditions for successful achievement in life are a hindrance in learning.” The coordination of these elements is very complicated. So in order to learn the coordination of these

elements, it is necessary to pay attention to how they are done, rather than focusing on the successful results when you combine them. This requires going at our own rate and keeping the focus on ourselves, rather than someone else's expectations for our success.

- Pg. 92 – Feldenkrais follows explaining why “no whistle, no metronome, no rhythm is used, no music and no drum.” Students learn to find their innate rhythm, depending on their structure. <This calls up a weakness of Dalcroze's method, and also a possible advantage to it. Weakness – Dalcroze asks everyone, regardless of their body structure, to adhere to a given rhythm. This is counterbalanced by the use of a variety of rhythms and musics over time, as well as the freedom within each activity to move the way you want. Opportunity – by providing the rhythm to the students, those unable to find their innate rhythm may discover it more easily over the course of the variations. Having found it in one place, they may then learn to adapt it in others. Clearly a combination of Feldenkrais and Dalcroze would be most advantageous here!>
- Pg. 94 – Awareness versus consciousness – There is no need to be aware at all times. It is helpful to use awareness when relearning. It may not be so helpful once the movement is learned...no one would want to think about all the elements of swallowing each time we swallow.
- Pg. 97 – 98 What is intuition? “Intuition works in the field in which the person has both wide experience and a vital personal interest.” Feldenkrais thinks certain situations are called “intuition” when they are actually awareness that leads to learning (Dr. Joliot-Curie hearing the clicks of a Geiger counter, recognizing their significance instead of discounting them, and going on to win the Nobel prize for discovering that induced or artificial radioactivity is an experimental fact.) “Intuition is an acceptable explanation, but with the reservation that it can apply only to men in the domain in which their entire personality has an intense interest.”
- Pg. 103 – “In the adult, the head turns intentionally and also automatically in reaction to any sudden changes in the teleceptors' stimulation. In either case, or for whatever other “factor”, the head turns right or left to locate the source of the change. The head is twisted until the organs of sight, hearing, and smell are equally stimulated, and in the long run even the shortest changes will turn the head to the source. The nervous system has learned to orient the head to the source by the difference in the stimulation of these organs, as

well as by their equality when the duration of the change is sufficient. The important thing is that *the rotation of the head to face the source of the change organizes the entire musculature to move the skeleton so that the brunt of the weight of the body is carried by the leg of the side to which the head is turned.*”

- Pg. 105 – “...sensitivity will increase with the reduction of your efforts.” This leads to higher attention and awareness and, subsequently, better judgment about what to do to improve.
- Pg. 117 – sequence: “You see, there is a kind of learning that goes with growth. You cannot skate before you can walk, no matter how clever you are, even if you are a genius. You must first learn to walk. You cannot walk before you crawl. If you learn to walk before you crawl you will be a cripple. You cannot learn to speak before you are vertical. You know why you cannot? In the human system each part comes into function in sequence one after another. The functioning helps the dominance, and changes the entire way of action. This type of learning must proceed at its own pace. We have no say in it. However, because this learning is done under human direction, it may be done in a different way than was intended by nature.”
- Pg. 132 – Why FI? “What I intend here is not to extol the merits of Functional Integration as compared with most, if not all, of the therapeutic means used in the world. I wish, however, to show that there is a different method of using ourselves which is incomparably above and beyond that which results from retaining our habitual cause and effect pattern of viewing the world. The alternative is quite expedient and often an easier way of coping with our problems or tasks. My contention is that very often there are better ways of thinking which open up new vistas and make the unthinkable real and put the impossible within our grasp.”
- Pg. 125 – 126 “Animal life consists of organisms that are structured in such a way that the functions of self-reproduction, self-maintenance, self-preservation, and self-direction exist. To us this means animal life. The first three structure-functions existed, very likely, long before the appearance of animal life in any proper sense. Similar functions can be distinguished in very large and heavy organic molecules. But self-direction is a notion which is meaningful only when attributed to an individuum, i.e. to a being that has a membrane, a skin, a boundary separating it from the rest of the world. Once such a separation is formed we have the individualization of a being. It

may be a very primitive one, or a very complex one. Such a separation means, at once, that some sort of commerce, some kind of exchange, must operate or be made by the individual being between that being and the outside world.” *Information passing through the boundaries, going out and in, is necessary in animal life, as well as food and excrement, oxygen and CO2, etc.* The exchange is biased to increase the viability of the being for a certain period until it ceases to live, when it is reabsorbed into the surroundings, whereby the boundary, the membrane, the individualization are resolved. Self direction loses its meaning when there is no self or individuum to whom self-direction is of some sort of interest. <Consider music as information coming in and out of the membrane> “To humans, self-direction appears to be connected with our representation of ourselves being upright.”

- Pg. 129 – “The important detail to understand is the multiple activity activity of the nervous system. It senses its own body and the objects of the environment and it has the curiosity to do these things. It repeats acts even if they are not successful and through the errors and slight adjustments slowly forms the paths through the synapses to write and play the violin. *Learning occurs when the nervous system repeats its exploratory activity on an object of the environment until it is successful, i.e. satisfies the intention. There is thus a continuous interaction between the sensory and motor activities which are practically never independent.*
- Pg. 132 – “...the tendency of the nervous system to optimal functioning coincides with minimal stimulation. The nervous impulses to the musculature will quieten down. The intentional cortex will be freer to ‘new pattern-forming’ than when everything in the system is engaged in some sort of activity, be it intentional or automatic habitual.
- “I now have a malleable entity before me with a large number of possibilities.”
- Pg. 141-2 Artificial floor – working with a whole function (standing/turning/balancing) is much more effective than just “moves.”
- Pg. 146 – 147 “Yet, I contend that in self-knowledge speech is a formidable obstacle. When it is used in all the various therapies available to analyze people’s minds it takes years to disentangle what goes on in us to make us say what we say, which is being analyzed. In self-knowledge one cannot get at fundamentals without undoing the link between thought and speech. We

were not born with thought and speech being indistinguishable. As we spend much time in learning to speak, unnoticed to ourselves, we have acquired the erroneous notion that speaking and thinking are synonymous. Words are symbols and not signs, as in mathematics. When I say 'I want' I may mean I desire, I need, or I lack. What do I think when I say 'I want'? I believe that I am selecting from my thinking only one of several shades of meaning and that is the one that I wish to communicate to another thinking human. I discover a new shade which is obvious to me but speech is a means of communicating only one aspect of my thinking to somebody else. Therefore, unless I am very careful I may communicate an aspect of my thinking which I never intended to communicate. Moreover, my interlocutor may understand another aspect of it which I never intended although he clearly heard it. You can see how treacherous this ground can be! I say I want to be a writer, but on examining myself I find out that when I say "I want" I am only describing what I lack. I am not a writer, it is only a wishful thought or a desire, so to myself, as to my interlocutor, my speech is really not thinking but a vague symbol indicating a large domain or an assembly of notions which may even contain their negations.

- Pg. 146-147 – “Suffice to think what God, truth, justice, honesty, communism, fascism, and so on mean in different human societies to see that much of our trouble lies in the fact that we confused speaking with thinking. Thinking is a much wider function which contains many forms of possible expression. Speech is a serial event, as words come one after the other in time and by their nature cannot communicate the thought which may contain an immense number of aspects.”
- Pg. 148-9 – “...as the body, in between any two activities whatsoever, must go through the upright standing configuration, so the brain too has a passing neutral configuration. It is the passage from one activity to the other that needs a cleaning of the slate, so to speak. *Just as standing can be considered dynamic at a particular point in the process of moving, so the quiescence of the brain is necessary in passing from one activity to the other. I believe that cleaning the slate takes probably a few milliseconds and is, therefore, unnoticeable except when the switching is defective.* Thus, I believe that ankle sprains and biting one's tongue occur when two actions follow each other before the slate is completely clean. These failures occur when we start a new intent while the former is not yet completed. Therefore, the new intent

starts before the slate is completely clean. We thus perform two incompatible actions simultaneously.”

- Pg. 150-151 – Without the neutral, there is no *choice* (i.e. – balancing on a high-wire without proper training means the neutral state isn’t possible for fear of falling, and balance cannot be found, as opposed to the way it can on a low beam.) No choice = compulsion. This is not life. “...the important issue is that no alternative means anxiety. Free choice means having at least another way. Free choice is meaningless when we are compelled to adopt the one and only way we know. Free choice means having an alternative mode of action available, so you can then choose the way you want most. To elect not to act is really no choice at all – it is not life.”

From the Amazon notes:

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Scientist, martial artist, and founder of the method that bears his name, Moshe Feldenkrais wrote several influential books on the relationship between movement, learning, and health. In *The Elusive Obvious* he presents ideas that are more relevant today than when the book was first published, as current research strongly supports many of the insights on which the Feldenkrais Method is based. This beautiful new edition is ready to be treasured by an emerging generation of somatic practitioners, movement teachers, performing artists, and anyone interested in self-improvement and healing. The two main strands of the Feldenkrais Method— Awareness Through Movement and Functional Integration— are now known by many around the world for reducing pain and anxiety, cultivating vitality, and improving performance. *The Elusive Obvious* presents a thorough and accessible explanation of the Feldenkrais Method, and, as its title indicates, throws light on the solutions to many of our difficulties that are hidden in plain sight.

