

## Proposing a “Secondary” Control –

exhibit A - Bipedal Dinosaurs

*This paper is written for people who are familiar with the principles of the Alexander Technique and most especially that of "Primary Control." It suggests a new principle, presented with visual imagery, that could be of value to AT. It was posted on the AlexTech List on Google Groups. A few minor changes have been made to the paper .*

*I wish to show appreciation to Jon Marqvardsen and Pete Green for helpful assistance with ideas and editing.*

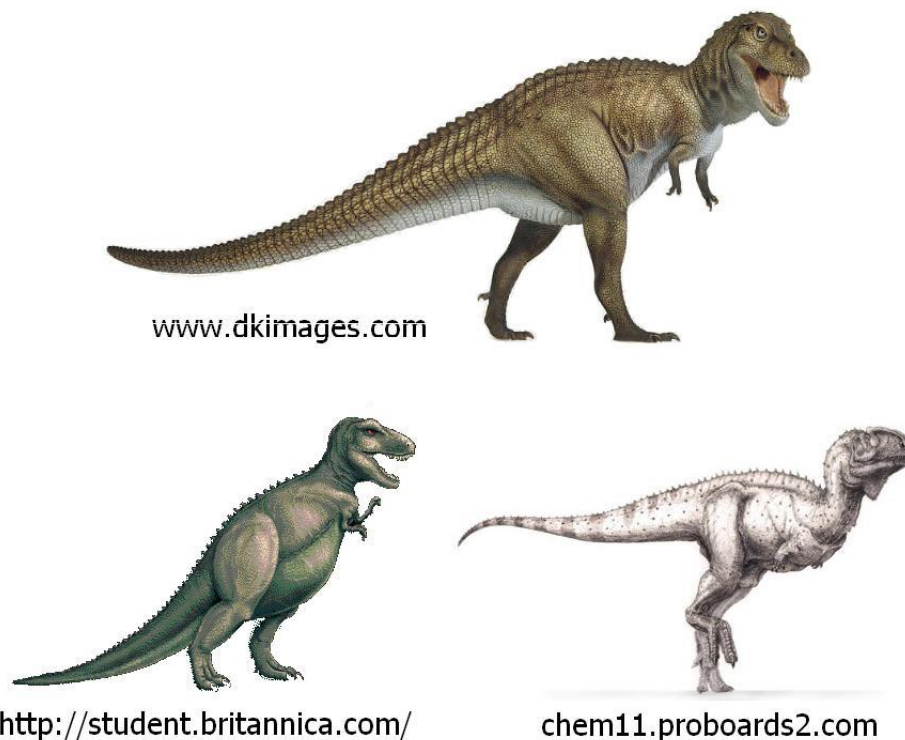


fig. 1

In the above drawings (fig. 1), we have some depictions of dinosaurs. Many species of dinosaurs had similar “postures” to those shown here. They were bipedal (two-legged) dinosaurs. In addition, it is seen that they were *horizontal* bipedal dinosaurs (or at least more horizontal than upright). What allows this? Well, primarily and obviously the tail. A massive tail counterbalances the front end of the body, allowing a horizontal orientation of the whole body.

Most people tend to think of humans as creatures who stand “from head to toe.” However, I think that the “head to toe” viewpoint or convention is actually misleading because it leaves us without

a visual and kinesthetic model of how we are actually oriented and how we best direct ourselves. Students and teachers of the Alexander Technique frequently speak of “neck free, head forward and up, back to lengthen and widen.” To me, with the *lengthening* of the back comes lengthening down through the “tail.” It is in the *widening* of the back that we get the most release in the legs.

But what of our “tail”? On the dinosaur, the tail had a huge importance. Not only did it counter balance the front end of the body, but it added power and made directed movement more graceful, flowing, modulated. In humans, the imagined or sensed tail has similar effects. However, since by appearances there is no tail (we, too frequently, use "appearances" as our sole source of information), we have talked ourselves out of using our "tail" as a resource.

In the top part of fig. 2, below, is an illustration of gross evolution of the three *functional* segments in tetrapods (or "quadrupeds," four-legged vertebrates having four feet, legs, or leg-like appendages). These segments are “sensed” distinctions that are intuitively recognizable but are not currently scientifically accepted. I call them the “director,” “motor,” and “rudder” segments. Below and outside of the boxed illustration are some archetypal horizontal bipedal tetrapods (that's a mouthful), which many dinosaurs are. The tail is doing much of the balancing of the "teter totter"-style body. (Bent knees and feet also play roles in this balancing).

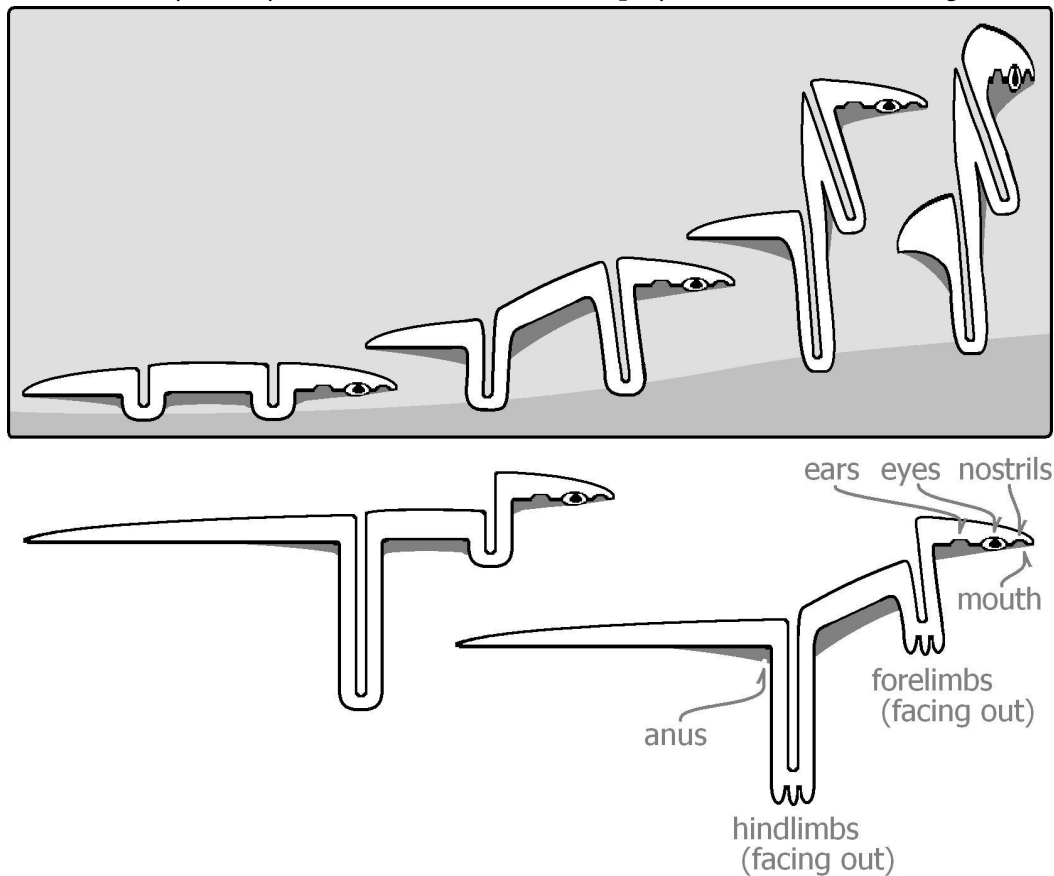


fig. 2

Humans became “upright” by virtue, primarily, of the center segment, the “motor” segment, becoming upright. And the tail disappeared... or did it? The vertebrae of our coccyx are fused but that does not mean that musculature and neural impulses in that area do not function to make us more graceful and even balanced... when going into a “monkey,” for instance. In fact, for some people, going into a “bipedal dinosaur” is a better model. Many people with habitually rounded shoulders, jutting neck, and rounded backs could do well to imagine that they have very healthy tails helping to counterbalance their heads while “bending.” (I put bending in quotes because there is no bending. It is more like “swiveling,” since the spine does not bend but rather pivots at the hips.)

For others with strong tendencies to hollow backs, the “monkey” is probably a better name (and conscious or unconscious image) for their squatting. (Imagining that they have a tail, and that it then shrinks and disappears, can be a good impulse for them.)

What I am really proposing here is that there be a little more consideration of the other end of the spine, which is the tail, and what role it may have in the appropriate directing our activities. Is it, perhaps, appropriate to consider the “tail” segment (or “rudder” segment, as I call it), and its relation to the rest of the body, “Secondary Control”?

Exercises below should show that the tail section is a powerful force in movement and balance, whether we are aware of it or not.

I have frequently, during semi-supine table work with a student, had them imagine that they had a *healthy* tail, like that of an alligator, and that a second teacher was cradling and directing the tail to lengthen as I was cradling and directing the head. It is effective and can produce an additional “aaahhhh” of relief as well as an added educational experience to ponder.

When bending or squatting, humans counterbalance their head and chest best by bending their knees and sending their buttocks backwards. What I call the “rudder” segment includes more than a tail. It includes the buttocks and the outer portions of the thighs, knees, shins, ankles, and feet (*see fig. 3*).

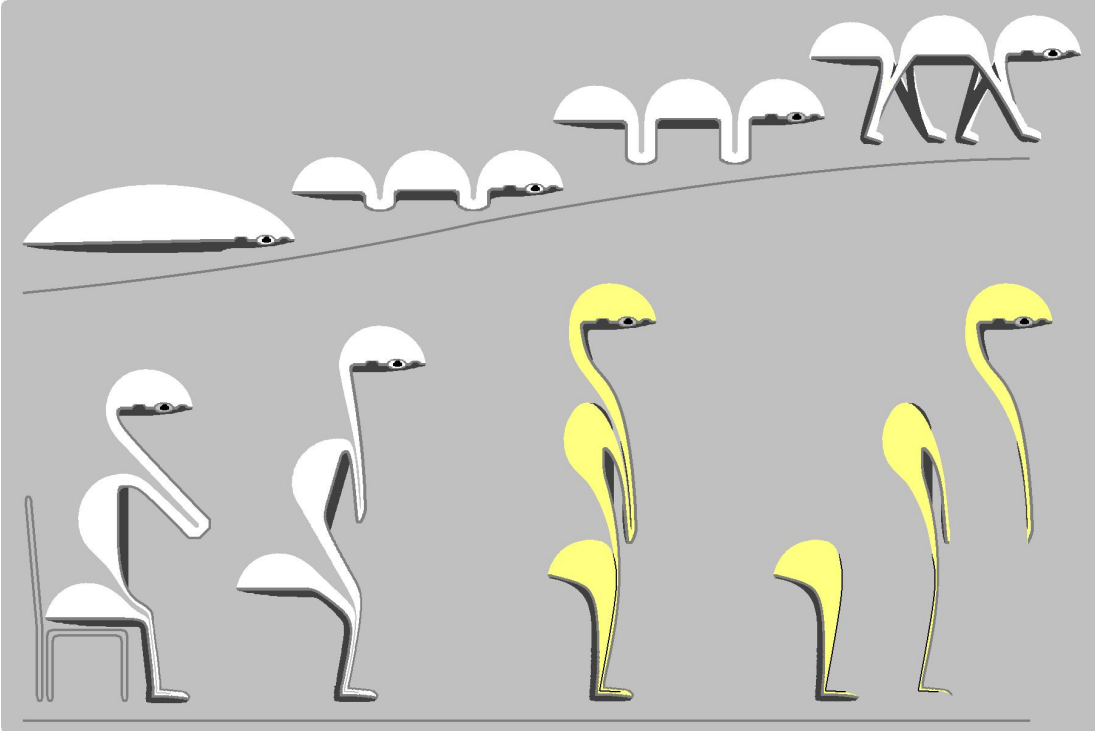


fig. 3

Look at the light yellow caricature, the most "human" one standing up, and notice how the "rudder" segment includes the outer half of the legs, which are rotated or spiraled 90 degrees so that the feet face forward. Virtually all tetrapods have this rotation, of varying degrees, of the dorsal and ventral surfaces of the limbs. Most of the the upper portion of fig. 3 does not show that rotation in order to indicate, more simply, the precise division between the three segments. All of the third area just described, the tail section or "rudder" segment, in its relationship to the forward and upper parts of the body, is what I suggest is a "Secondary Control."

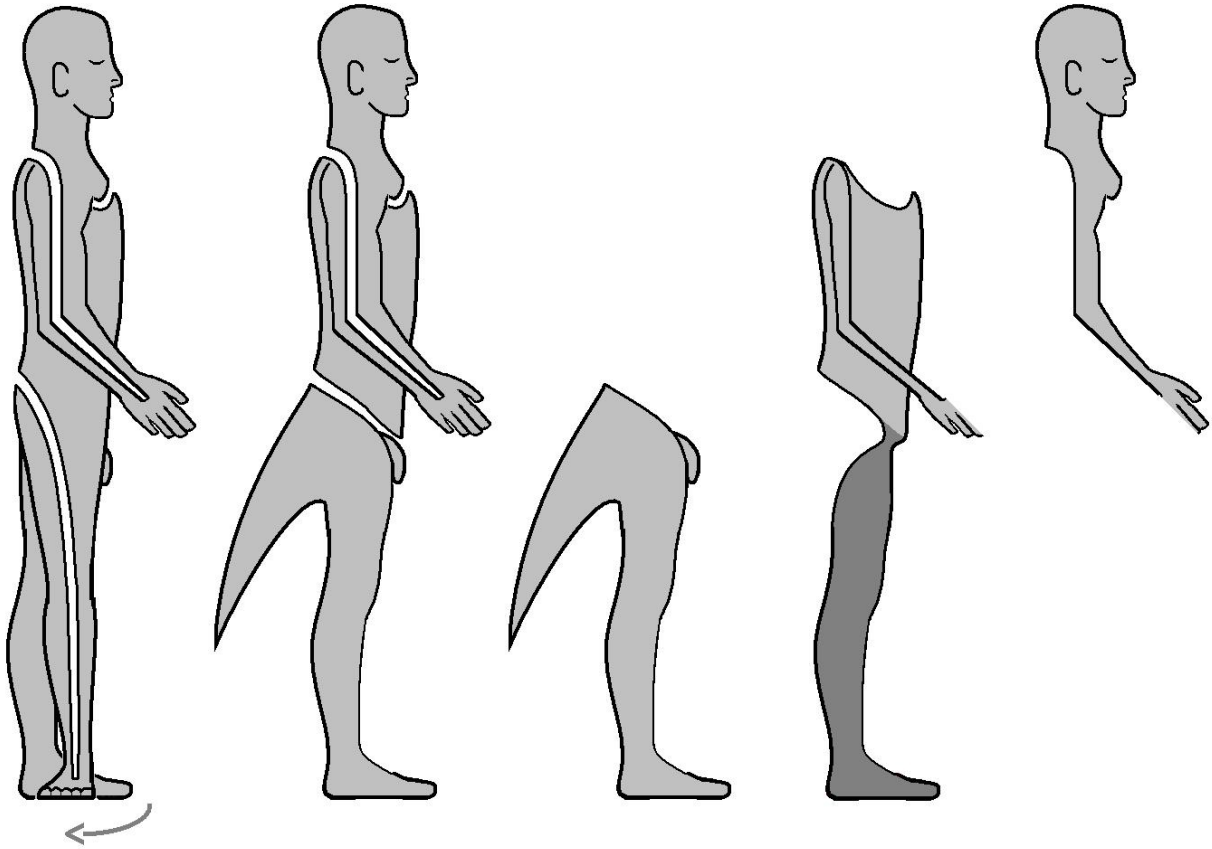
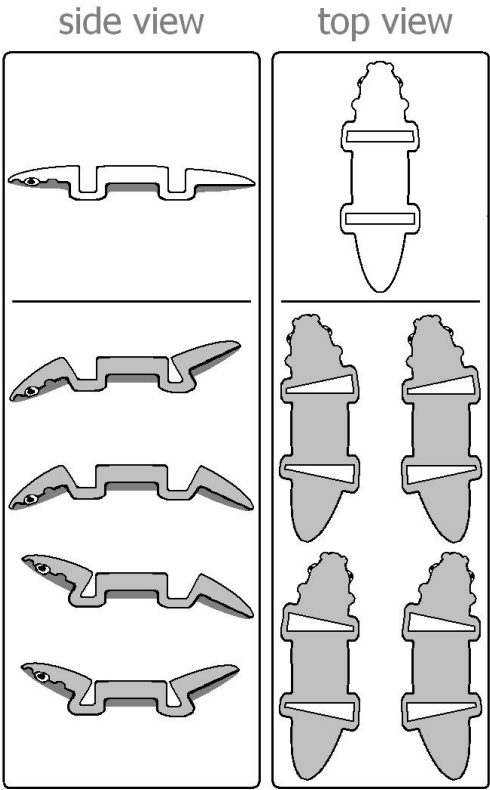


fig. 4

In figure 4, this more human-like illustration shows the three functional segments. In the first figure to the left, the leg is turned out to show the split between the segments. In reality, the "rudder" segment includes our entire "tail section" (without the tail). The darker gray leg illustration represents the inner half of both legs.



From what I have quickly outlined here and with a bit of diligence, you can imagine your entire “rudder” segment flipping to the left, to the right, up, down, or some combinations. With any success at all, the effect on posture, movement, and tension (either alleviated or increased) cannot be denied.

In a future short paper like this, I plan to outline yet another control system, the "seam along the border between the dorsal and ventral surfaces of the body. This area I consider to have major importance in posture, support, and expression.

fig. 5

I hope you find my ideas fun and useful.

Thanks,

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<http://posturereleaseimagery.org/>