Fall and Recovery - What Can AI Safety Learn from Humphrey's Dance Theory?

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Original Note Link

Doris Humphrey, 1895 - 1958

As a yoga practitioner, what I keep returning to is this: how is information stored in the body, and how is it retrieved through the brain?

I am painfully aware that this is an oversimplification, and that I need to fill the gaps fully. Maybe filling this gap is a life's work. What I do not fully understand is why we still feel the need to abandon the body, dance theory, and art, and explain intelligence with tools that standardize experience rather than stay with its uniqueness.

Doris Humphrey's dance theory has always fascinated me more than many abstract accounts of consciousness. She says all human movement occurs between two deaths: fall and recovery. Movement happens between these extremes, as the body constantly falls away from its center of gravity and returns to it. Maybe one measure available to us for consciousness is the distance between these two modes of being.

This matters for AI safety because our models are increasingly designed to produce coherence without necessarily having any relation to imbalance, orientation, recovery, or consequence. They can describe uncertainty without undergoing it. They can simulate emotional language without the bodily subtext that gives emotion its weight.

And maybe the real problem is that AI researchers are sitting with the hardest problem in the world while being mediated by the question itself, rather than by being in the experience. If safety is only treated as a problem of control, evaluation, and prediction, we may miss the more basic question: what kind of system are we building, and what forms of experience, relation, and recovery does it make possible or impossible?

A theory of AI safety that ignores the body may end up mistaking fluent description for understanding. And a theory of consciousness that ignores fall and recovery may never notice what it means for something to find, lose, or return to its center.