

Commentaries

FREE WILL AS TRANSCENDING THE UNIDIRECTIONAL NEURAL SUBSTRATE

by Joseph F. Rychlak

In his review essay of my *Discovering Free Will and Personal Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) Robert B. Glassman has made a number of interpretations of what the book's contents actually convey.¹ I would therefore like to make a few clarifying points on my side of the ledger, framing my reactions to Glassman around five questions.

(1) *What does "responsibility" mean?* My definition of responsibility is "the recognition that we play a role in the fixing of predications, premises, and grounds for the sake of which we behave."² This is a purely psychological—with the emphasis on the *logical*—definition of responsibility. Glassman suggests that by contending the person is psychologically responsible for his or her life premises I am forced into an implicit moral standard in which I would be unable to feel sympathy for the disadvantaged. I discuss the question of the repressive or unsympathetic manner of the moralist, but in so doing attempt to explain why this is the case in psychological terms.³ I take no position on the plight of the disadvantaged in this book. Although it is true that a conservative person might interpret my views to support an unsympathetic outlook, the liberal has the same option to frame my explanations amidst sympathetic understandings of the disadvantaged. On this latter score, Adelbert D. Jenkins, a black psychologist, has recently relied heavily on my outlook to explain how the repressed blacks in America have retained their individuality and personal responsibility in the face of slavery, economic denial, and continuing racial prejudice.⁴

(2) *Why should psychological science readmit final-cause description?* Glassman claims I do not appreciate that the motivation for doing an efficiently causal, reductionistic analysis in science is because the scientist wants to understand things thoroughly and refuses to cherish fundamental mystery. I hope the reader appreciates that at no point in my book do I cherish mystery. But the claim that I do not appreciate the motivation behind reductionism is confusing because I devote an entire chapter to this very issue. I show in detail, for example, how Francis Bacon criticized Aristotle for using causal descriptions in science that went beyond what was actually observed, summing up with:

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"Thanks to Bacon's influence, natural scientists have since argued that not until we have reduced things as seen by the unsophisticated eye [Glassman's "mystery"] . . . to the underlying substances and forces that 'make them up' have we succeeded in giving a proper account of them."⁵ It is important to add here that Bacon did not dismiss telic (final-cause) descriptions altogether. Like so many of the founding fathers of natural science, he wanted to describe certain aspects of the human experience (e.g., theological, metaphysical analyses, etc.) in terms of final causation. It was only in the physical realm that he called for restrictions ("reductions") to material/efficient causation.

Glassman begs the question when he claims that by reducing mental processes to underlying biological processes without accommodating for final causation we have made anything more understandable. This is what we are debating in psychology today. I contend that reductionistic arguments cannot account for mentation unless they combine the traditional material/efficient-cause meanings used in such theories with the formal/final-cause meanings. We do find formal-cause constructs in psychobiological theories, such as in the organizational patterning of the brain. Glassman's favorite formal-cause conception seems to be a totality notion which he variously refers to as "complexity" and "holism." But I argue we also need a clear understanding of final causation if we are to round out the person's fundamental human nature.

(3) *Can cybernetic explanations account for final causation in human behavior?* Glassman pins his hopes on computer analogues to account for the role of purpose, or final causation, in human behavior. He believes feedback systems can model how we guide our behavior and draws a parallel between a furnace thermostat and his own body's capacity to adapt to changes in temperature. The implication here is that our mind's purpose is identical to this sort of purposive working of our bodily mechanisms. Interestingly, this is precisely the kind of description that Bacon rejected in the Aristotelian account! Calling the servomechanism a purposive line of action is like saying that bones have it as their purpose to hold up the muscles and tissues of the body.⁶ Bacon properly noted that it adds absolutely nothing to the account to assign this sort of purpose to the description of physical events.

The point is that Glassman's usage has failed to accommodate the meaning of "that, for the sake of which," the basic definition of final causation.⁷ In my book I distinguish between theoretical explanations framed introspectively (i.e., from the point of view of the object/person under description) and theoretical explanations framed extraspectively (i.e., from the point of view of an observer looking at an object/person under description). As a biological reductionist, Glassman's understanding of human behavior is framed extraspectively. He wants to assign purpose to an object under description "over there." Material and efficient causes lend themselves to extraspective description, and so Glassman mistakenly believes he is somehow observing a purposive physical mechanism and that his reductive account therefore explains teleological behavior. In fact, what he has done is to assign a needless theoretical appendage to the explanation. There is no purpose being served in the ongoing mechanism of bodily adaptation; however, there is a purpose going on in the mentation of Glassman, who is seeking to understand and explain something under his observation (i.e., bodily servomechanisms). But to appreciate his psychologic we must assume an introspective theoretical perspective. We must get his slant on things and see what it is that he premises and descriptively behaves "for the sake of."

(4) *Why is dialectical reasoning so important to the telic account?* I place great stock in the absolute necessity of viewing human reason as capable of both a “demonstrative” and a “dialectical” strategy in reason. I take these terms from Aristotle.⁸ In the present context they refer to the manner in which the person arrives at his or her major premise, preliminary to continuing a line of reasoning. Demonstrative reasoning begins with premises that are affirmed as primary and true (i.e., unquestioned, not contradicted, taken literally, etc.) and dialectical reasoning begins in the choice among alternative premises (i.e., possibilities, opinions, conflicting viewpoints, etc.). If a person can reason from what is input from experience to what was not input but concocted—however uniquely and even psychotically!—based upon the dualities of dialectical reasoning, then we have a beginning grounds for understanding psychologically how free will may be functioning. Free will becomes the capacity that human beings have to rearrange—by way of dialectical negations, redefinitions, contradictions, and so on—the grounds for the sake of which they will be determined.

Note that I am taking an introspective stance here. I am looking through the conceptual eyes of the human being. I am also assuming that determinism is not limited to an efficient-cause interpretation. There are four types of determinisms, issuing from the meanings of the four causes. Glassman like so many psychologists limits determinism to an efficient-cause interpretation. Final-cause determinism is what we mean by psychic determinism, and I am therefore holding there is no basic contradiction between free will and final-cause determinism in human behavior. Indeed, the human behavior we know as “mind” is always based upon final-cause determinations, moving from premises to inferences, inductions, deductions, conclusions, and all those meaningful extensions to which we refer in speaking of a line of thought. This is what I refer to as a “telosponsive” process. To telospond is to behave “for the sake of” precedent meanings affirmed as premises and extended sequaciously (i.e., logically necessarily) into behavior. I cite many examples of this kind of behavior in the book under review.

The acid test of any theory of free will is whether or not we can think of the course of events as remaining identical but a different outcome is made possible through the—basically arbitrary—actions of an agent. I claim that dialectical reasoning and the bipolar meanings it makes possible allows us to pass the acid test. From this perspective the person is always capable of transcending what “is” and using the very meaning of this “is” to reason to the “is not” (dialectical opposite). It is this self-reflexive process in human mentation that enables us to speak of free will, because in a dialectical formulation of experience there are always at least two courses of action suggested—and in fact, many more (the one-and-many principle of classical philosophy).

Glassman claims I advocate an extreme form of mind-body dualism, which is precisely what I do *not* advocate. In my chapter on the uncyanetic brain I specifically state: “. . . rather than having to postulate two distinct *energeis* [i.e., body vs. mind] which double the mind via separate sources of stimulation, the many-in-one thesis permits us to say that the *same* realm of energy may operate in certain brain cells to produce dualities in meaning.”⁹ I ask that some brain researcher begin taking the dialectic seriously, *not* to do as Glassman does—explain it away as a negative image (opposites are not the same for all people!)—but to think of a *patterning* of meaning in the brain which encompasses “this” and “not this” as a reflection of the mechanism of brain function-

ing. I am all for such theoretical development. I consider my theory of mentation to be monistic and nativistic.

(5) *Can a mechanism reflect?* The last point I would make is that Glassman's talk of free will as functioning in the present whereby, in a relaxed moment, we should reflect on the influences that are likely to affect us, is a beautiful summation of the sort of mediation theory I criticize negatively in the volume under review. Glassman has accepted free will as a sort of statistical unpredictability brought on through the actions of mediating alternatives.¹⁰ I cannot review the arguments I give why such an explanation is inadequate but suffice to say that he continues his demonstrative, extraspective analysis in speaking of free will in this manner. He fails to say how it is possible for the servomechanism to reflect, since it is not capable of dialectical examination of its premises, which are demonstratively accepted—that is, uncritically accepted—because the basic program framing its “behavior” is *never* put to question by a cybernetic machine. All reflection amounts to in a computer is a subroutine, framed from the (formal-cause) program and enacted mechanically (i.e., efficiently-causally). As there is no purpose, there is no reflection in such a mechanism. Feedback merely tells the machine what it is currently doing and fails to capture decision making in the way that human beings experience it.¹¹

I feel it is time for psychology to throw off the prejudices of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries against description of human beings in telic (i.e., final-cause) fashion. I think the time is ripe for a Kuhnian revolution in the description of human behavior. There are no serious obstacles conceptually, and, as I have shown in the book under review, no empirical evidence to undercut this reasonable alternative.

NOTES

1. Robert B. Glassman, “Free Will Has a Neural Substrate: Critique of Joseph F. Rychlak's *Discovering Free Will and Personal Responsibility*,” *Zygon* 18 (March 1983): 67-82.

2. Joseph F. Rychlak, *Discovering Free Will and Personal Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 289.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

4. Adelbert D. Jenkins, *The Psychology of the Afro-American: A Humanistic Approach* (Elmsford, N.Y.: Pergamon Press, 1982).

5. Rychlak, p. 19.

6. Francis Bacon, “Advancement of Learning,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. R. M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 30:45.

7. Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. R. M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 8:533.

8. Aristotle, “Topics,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. R. M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 8:143.

9. Rychlak, p. 204.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 81.

11. For an excellent analysis of the differences between judgmental reason and calculation see J. Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1976).