

All Grace Doctrine Is not Grace Doctrine: Theology of Neurology: Specificity & Plasticity Enable Spiritual Growth; Richard Restak: Spooky Stuff and Volition; Paul's Behavior Problem: Romans 7:14-25

13. All Grace Doctrine is not Grace Doctrine. The difference between those who are making the advance and those who are wannabes is the free-will factor – the impulse to pursue righteousness motivated by a hunger and a thirst to acquire its wisdom so that righteous application can become habitual.
14. Believers can attend this church regularly, they can learn the information through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit while at the same time have no interest in the overall purpose of the process: to apply what they know to life and circumstances.
15. All wisdom is based on what is understood and retained in the *kardia*. But if that information is never applied, then the purpose for studying the Word is never accomplished.
16. Any believer, regardless of his human IQ, has the necessary assets to advance to spiritual maturity. But those assets are rendered ineffectual if the person has no real interest in the intended objective of applying it.
17. Back in 1996, prior to studying Paul's behavior problem in Romans 7:1-14, we took up a study of the phenomenal computer of the human brain in *The Theology of Neurology*. In paragraph 5, "The Capacity to Orient and Adjust," we observed two brain functions that relate to free will: (1) specificity and (2) plasticity." Here are some salient points from that study that pertain to our current subject:

In order to function effectively, the human brain must possess two contradictory properties: (1) stability in order to resist the pressures of daily exigencies which continue over a lifetime, and (2) the ability to adapt and modify one's beliefs in the face of repeated experience. This stability is called "specificity."

We always go with what we know and tend to reject the unknown, the new, or the different. But life is a series of experiences each of which brings new challenges to our established belief system. Whenever we orient to this new information and adjust accordingly we have become plastic—and a change occurs in our brain's chemical makeup.

Those things which are stable or "specific" are established wheel-tracks. The laying of new wheel-tracks indicates the capability of the brain to make adjustments and indicates that it has capacity for change. (p. 850)

"Plasticity" allows for spiritual growth—the ability to take in new information, the capacity to establish new wheel-tracks, and the flexibility to adjust to new circumstances. Life demands the capacity to orient and adjust and the brain therefore must be equipped with the capability to make those adjustments.

Order comes from all of this because volition is able to only choose from an inventory of what it knows and what it knows it considers absolute. If change is to occur, the established principle must be conceived of as flawed. The new idea must become a wheel-track offering opposition to the old idea whenever future decision-making circumstances occur.

Once again it is demonstrated that personal volition is the governor of the soul and that the individual must be held responsible for his own life. Thus, specificity is the brain's capacity to catalogue absolute truth as a foundation for soul order. Plasticity is the brain's capacity to alter one's belief system whenever a wicked wheel-track is uncovered. Whenever a wheel-track is laid, its availability for recall under pressure is contingent upon the brain's capacity to remember.¹ (p. 851)

18. The conclusion to that study addressed the part played by human free will in a person's decision-making process:

Throughout my research I was amused to see among the writers (referenced) a consistently blind devotion to the theology of evolution. Neurologists recognize that there is something which controls human thought but they insist in isolating it in the cerebral cortex. The answer is of course found in the soul and in particular human volition. Whereas in the nineteenth century, science was quick to recognize theology as a part of the creation, it no longer does so in the twentieth.

Today, the scientific community is subservient to a secular government for its financial survival. Both are inflexibly committed to the view that evolution is scientific law rather than unproved theory. The mention of "spooky stuff"² in a grant request would make it illegal for the government to issue the funds and politically incorrect of the applicant who broached the subject.

However, there is a neuroscientist [Dr. Richard M. Restak] who at least has the courage to address the subject of free will. You will find some of his thoughts at least encouraging if not theological:

Despite the limitations in our knowledge about the brain and its relationship to violence, courts are increasingly willing to accept "brain disease" as a mitigating factor in determining guilt or innocence.

¹ Joe Griffin, "The Theology of Neurology: The Capacity to Orient and Adjust," in *The Christian Way of Life* (St. Charles: Joe Griffin Media Ministries, 1996), pp. 850-51.

² A term used by philosopher Patricia Churchland: "Ever since a high school biology teacher had tried to assure her that people are alive because they are animated by an inexplicable life-force, she had been suspicious of what she called "spooky stuff," phenomena that supposedly fell outside the sphere of science." (George Johnson, "Spooky Stuff," in *In the Palaces of Memory: How We Build the Worlds inside Our Heads* [New York: Vantage Books, 1991], 207).

Slowly, the emphasis is shifting away from the principle that a person is responsible for his or her behavior and toward various “explanations” why certain people engage in criminal or other self-destructive actions. On the face of it, this redefinition of volition³ and individual responsibility seems to make sense. With this question, brain scientists come to grips with the issues of good and evil. (p. 155)

What becomes of our traditional belief in personal responsibility if the killing of another person is viewed not as a matter of choice but, rather, as due to some irresistible impulse emanating from a damaged brain? With some people, acts of consideration and kindness towards others seem natural, indeed even inevitable. It is as if they couldn't imagine themselves acting any other way. If this is true, what happens to volition? Are such people acting kindly only as a result of some patterning within their brain? Are those who love and those who hate others merely acting out different brain activity patterns? I recognize that in raising such questions, I am proceeding quite a bit beyond my own training and education. I am neither a theologian nor a moral philosopher. But that aside, it does seem to me that a belief in goodness and the existence of good people who have loving and caring feelings toward others must imply a belief in the existence of evil or whatever word you might wish to substitute for people who not only commit, but seem to enjoy committing, gratuitous and inexplicable acts of cruelty and destructiveness toward others. (pp. 155-56)

Neurology is not going to solve the mystery of why some people kill others. Neither can it help us discover why killers are often not just unwilling participants in something beyond their control, but rather, judging from their own words and actions, often engage in something that gives them great pleasure.

As Ronald Markham, who has examined more murderers than perhaps any psychiatrist in the United States says, “Our society is leaning awfully close to the idea that you have to be mentally ill in some way to commit a crime. This is not so. Most crimes—even grisly murders—are not committed by mentally ill people, but by people just like you and me.”

It's likely that the tendency towards violence, like most human behaviors, follows a bell curve. At one end are those who, even in the face of extreme or life-threatening provocation, cannot arouse themselves to violent action. Further along the continuum are the rest of us, who are capable of violence if the stakes are high enough. At the other extreme are the habitually and chronically violent, whose actions do not represent insanity and certainly not brain damage, but only the outer limits of our human potential for violence. (p. 158)

³ Dr. Restak refers to the human ability to choose by the word “will.” I take the liberty of substituting the word “volition.”

But even a casual effort at introspection reveals that even the most balanced of us are often of two or more “minds.” One part of us wants desperately to do something, while another part resists with a ferocity that leaves us feeling disjointed and conflicted. At such times we wonder if more than one person occupies our bodies.⁴
(p. 120)

NOTE: Restak inadvertently describes the ongoing battle between the old sin nature and the Holy Spirit for control of the believer’s soul, a struggle that is described dramatically by Paul in Romans 7:14-25. Here is the expanded translation of that passage that we developed in the 1996 series *The Christian Way of Life*:

Romans 7:14 - We comprehend in long-term memory traces that the Law is spiritual, but I am tendentially [**This use of the present tense represents the idea of that which is inclined to occur though it is not actually taking place.**⁵] carnal, belonging to the realm of the sinful nature, when I have been led astray under the authority of the sinful nature.

v. 15 - For what I do—what perpetually works its way out of me—I do not understand; because what I resolve to do [**wheel-tracks of righteousness**], these things I am tendentially not practicing, but what I detest [**when-tracks of wickedness**] these things I keep on doing [**because they are facilitated into paths of least resistance**].

v. 16 - Now if I keep doing this thing which I do not desire to do, I keep on agreeing with the Law that it is advantageous.

v. 17 - But as the case really stands, I am no longer habitually performing this thing [**production of the sinful nature**], but the sinful nature which keep on living in me.

v. 18 - In fact, I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) there does not reside any good of intrinsic value, for the desire to do the will of God is present in me but the divine-good production of my desire is not [**doctrine understood is not applied**].

v. 19 - For the intrinsic good I desire, I do not do, but the evil which I do not desire, this I keep on practicing.

v. 20 - Now if, as a result of my personal volitional decision, I am doing what I do not desire to do (and I am), I am no longer the one producing the sinful act but the sinful nature which continuously resides inside of me.

v. 21 - Consequently, I discover this principle, that when I desire to do the honorable thing, the law of evil resides in me.

v. 22 - For along with other believers, I habitually delight in God’s principles resident in the soul [**the inner man**],

⁴ Richard M. Restak, *The Modular Brain: How New Discoveries in Neuroscience Are Answering Age-Old Questions about Memory, Free Will, Consciousness, and Personal Identity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), 155-56, 158, 120.

⁵ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillian Co., 1927, 1955), 186.

v. 23 - but I see a different kind of principle in my body parts [**memory traces in the brain**] laying siege in a campaign against the principle of my mind and so making me a prisoner to the principle of the sinful nature which is located in my body parts.

v. 24 - I ... a miserable person! Who will rescue me from the body of this death?

v. 25 - Grace belongs to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, on the one hand, with my mind I myself am obligated to comply with the principle of God [**wheel-tracks of righteousness**], but on the other hand, with my flesh I myself impulsively capitulate to the principle of sin [**wheel-tracks of wickedness**].

19. Today, Restak's assertion that how people behave finds its source in free will decisions is controversial. For over a hundred years social "scientists" – and it is a stretch to assign the term scientist to those who claim absolute knowledge about what motivates behavior among individuals – have subscribed to a branch of psychology called behaviorism:

The theory that human and animal behavior can be explained in terms of conditioning, without appeal to thoughts or feelings, and that psychological disorders are best treated by altering behavior patterns.⁶

⁶ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. "behaviorism."