On Books

Self-Control as Catholicon: A Review of *Self-Control: Waiting Until Tomorrow For What You Want Today* by A. W. Logue

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The take-home message of Logue's *Self-Control: Waiting Until Tomorrow For What You Want Today* (1995) has two parts. The first is that virtually all behavior can be conceptualized as choice between a small, immediate reward and a large, delayed reward, that is, as impulse versus self-control. The second part of the message is that self-control analyses suggest treatment interventions for practically every known human problem, from depression and suicide to cheating and lying to accident prevention and saving for retirement. This is a 1990s kind of popular book: short, cursory, hyped, with a scientific tone, and evidently designed for the talk-show circuit. Given this objective, the book succeeds reasonably well.

In Parts I and II, Logue gives a scientific cast to the discussion. She takes the behavioral laboratory paradigm of choosing between small, immediate rewards and large, delayed rewards as defining impulsiveness and self-control. She also argues that the evolutionary past probably favored impulsive choices, that is, choices of small, immediate rewards. One reason for this is that an individual might not live long enough to collect large, delayed rewards. Logue compares the evolution-

ary past to the present environment, in which it is often beneficial to make self-control choices, that is, to wait for the large, delayed rewards. This evolutionary argument at once excuses us from our base desire for immediate gratification (it's the fault of evolution) and establishes a motivation for learning about self-control: We can read Logue's book, learn how to overcome the burdensome legacy of our evolutionary past, and then proceed to function effectively in the present environment. Good can triumph over evil, if only we work at it.

The main part of the book is Part III, in which applications of self-control are discussed. In this part, Logue forgets much of the scientific detail she presented in Parts I and II, just as her readers will. This is a good strategy for two reasons. First, readers don't want to hear about all the scientific details. It is enough to know that there *are* such details. After that, most readers are happy to trust the author to apply the details correctly. The rule here is that it is only necessary to set a scientific tone in order to discuss with authority the problems that are of interest to readers. The actual application of science is not necessary. The second reason that it is a good idea to abandon much of the scientific detail is that retaining it would substantially restrict the scope of the discussion. Many of the problems that Logue deals with are only vaguely consistent with the laboratory paradigm. Sticking with the sci-

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entific details would require elaborate explanations, justifications, and cautions in order to include the marginally relevant problems. This would make the book too cumbersome and too long. Logue does intersperse various types of scientific commentary throughout Part III, but in most cases these interludes serve only to refresh the scientific tone; they rarely bear specifically on the application under discussion.

Logue also relaxes the definitions of self-control and impulsiveness in Part III. In Parts I and II, these terms referred to choices between small, immediate rewards and large, delayed rewards. In Part III they are extended to include most of their ordinary-language meanings. For example, considering the long-term consequences of a course of action and making a sensible decision in light of those considerations constitutes self-control (p. 132), as does using self-statements to control emotional and physiological responses, and using problem-solving strategies that include planning, evaluation of alternatives, and anticipation of consequences (p. 130). Basically, any circumstance that can be construed as weighing both short- and long-term consequences can be brought under the umbrella of self-control. In this part of the book, the definitions of self-control and impulsiveness are also allowed to recover an important characteristic of their ordinary-language usage, namely their reference to characteristics of persons. That is, *people* may be described as impulsive or self-controlled in Part III, not just behavior. Not surprisingly, this also permits the introduction of additional methods of assessing self-control, including personality tests (p. 109) and self-control questionnaires (p. 130). In Part III Logue clearly goes far beyond the behavior-analytic laboratory definitions of Parts I and II.

Relaxing definitions and recovering ordinary-language meanings are probably important if readers are to easily understand how the discussion applies to them. They also constitute an excel-

lent example of what happens when ordinary-language terms are retained in scientific work. To be sure, laboratory scientists who use the terms *self-control* and *impulsiveness* may insist on precisely specifying the referents of these terms. But because the terms have extensive ordinary-language meanings, it is easy to slip into that universe of discourse and forget that the ordinary-language meanings do not square exactly with the laboratory definitions. If these terms were not a part of the research literature, I doubt that Logue could have written this book.

Forgetting much of the scientific detail and relaxing the definitions of self-control and impulsiveness allow Logue to address a breathtaking range of applications. She discusses eating disorders, drug abuse, sexual behavior, accident prevention, exercise, studying, cheating, teaching, managing money, gambling, theft, cooperation, lying, depression, suicide, aggression, and psychopathy. And that's just for starters. In the chapter on eating disorders, there are specific applications to obesity, anorexia, and bulimia. In the chapter on drug abuse, there are individual discussions of alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, nicotine, and caffeine abuse. In the section on teaching, there is also a discussion of research productivity. In the section on managing money, there are discussions of saving for retirement, impulsive spending, and getting out of debt. And there's more. There are sections on coping with stress and coping with illness, for example. All this, and still more, is contained in just 170 pages. Of course, a volume like this must make contact with as many members of a diverse audience as possible, and Logue has pursued this objective with great determination. I doubt she has omitted a single human activity that could be construed even remotely as self-control. As a consequence, almost every reader will find something that applies to him or her in this book.

Has the self-control catholicon solved all our problems? Not really.

But they have all been discussed, and so there's more than enough grist for the talk-show mill. In addition to formulating virtually every known human problem in terms of self-control, Logue makes numerous treatment suggestions. Some are based on self-control, but many are based on other behavior-analytic principles, and still other suggestions are "tips and tricks" of the generic-psychologist variety or are just plain common sense. A fair number of the treatment suggestions are, at best, unremarkable. For example, to control unwanted pregnancies, Logue recommends vasectomies for men and, for women, refusing offers of car rides from their dates (p. 126). In the accident-prevention category, she recommends baby-proofing your home to prevent injuries to your child, taking your car in for regular maintenance to prevent auto accidents, using a rubber mat in the bathtub to prevent injuries from falling, and wearing ear plugs, gloves, and a face shield when using a chain saw to prevent bodily injury (p. 127). Except for the car-ride recommendation, these suggestions are eminently reasonable, but didn't our mothers tell us all this already? Maybe so, but the difference is that Logue arrives at these recommendations through self-control analyses. For example, baby-proofing your home is conceptualized as choosing the large, delayed reward of seeing your baby live into the future injury-free over the small, immediate reward of not having to go to the trouble of locking up your poisons and removing your breakables to higher shelves. Refusing a car ride from your date means choosing the large, delayed reward of not getting pregnant over the small, immediate reward of going for a fun ride. What do the self-control analyses add to the maternal advice? Well, they add an air of expertise, of authority. They are a "your mother was right because . . ." kind of thing. Of course, Oprah would never have your mother on her show, but she might very well want to interview Dr. Logue.

Self-control is everywhere, and the helpful tips abound. To deal with the problem of exercise, Logue recommends that companies build free fitness centers and then give employees paycheck bonuses for exercising in them (p. 128). That could happen. To deal with stress she recommends that people with stressful jobs look for jobs that are not so stressful (p. 129). Again, Logue uses a self-control analysis to give this suggestion the weight of scientific authority. Think about it. Studying problems? Logue recommends that students join study groups (p. 135). Increasing research productivity among faculty? "They can be shown time-saving techniques for effective teaching, as well as techniques for finding time for research during busy days" (p. 140). Great! How about saving money? Join a savings plan (p. 143). Too much debt? Freeze your credit cards in a six-inch block of ice (pp. 144ff). What about impulsive spenders? "They can limit the cash and checks that they carry, as well as the number of credit cards that they own" (p. 145).

Okay, but what about more complicated problems? For example, can self-control analyses aid in the treatment of traditional psychological disorders? Sure they can. For anorexia nervosa Logue suggests that a useful part of treatment might be to have the anorexic woman speak with others who have had health problems from anorexia (p. 96). Another idea is to try to convince the anorexic woman that most people do not find her standard of thinness attractive (p. 96). Both of these suggestions are based on self-control. The first is supposed to make the delay to the large reward (not being sick) seem shorter. The second is supposed to make the immediate reward (being thin) less valuable. Depression and suicide? Prozac® and support groups may help (p. 159). What should be done with aggressive children? Have them "become familiar with older aggressive children who have miserable lives as a result of their aggression" (p. 165). Why? Because it will help to de-

crease the perceived time to the negative consequences of aggression. The list of treatment suggestions could go on, but suffice it to say that most of them are, at best, cursory. This is not surprising, given the vast territory that Logue covers and the slimness of the volume she has written. Moreover, a careful discussion is probably not necessary in a book like this. What *is* important is that there be material to talk about, and there is plenty of that.

For a popular book, Logue's writing is often too academic. For example, Parts I and II, which provide the scientific tone, are too long. This is no doubt a reflection of the principal problem facing the academic who writes a popular book, namely trying to serve the two masters of popular appeal and academic respectability. But once even a small measure of academic respectability has been lost, all is lost, and so one might as well give up. Indeed, many of the virtues associated with a popular treatment are vices from an academic perspective. There are at least three such items in Logue's book. The first is the relaxing of definitions and recovery of ordinary-language meanings. As noted earlier, this allows her to connect easily with ordinary experience and cover a great deal of territory, but from an academic perspective it introduces far too much play into the analysis. If one wishes to apply laboratory research to naturally occurring behavior in a careful way, then it is necessary to show that the laboratory preparation captures all the important characteristics of the natural behavior. Put another way, the naturally occurring situations should be selected such that all their important characteristics are also present in the laboratory preparation, and such that the laboratory preparation does not entail anything important that is missing from the naturally occurring situation. This is what a laboratory model is all about (McDowell, 1988).

A second item that is a problem from an academic perspective is Logue's cursory development of applications to

human problems. Again, this allows her to cover a lot of territory. However, she often fails to note the complexities of the problems she is addressing, the tentativeness of her conceptualizations and applications, and the existence of other conceptualizations and treatments that, for some of the problems she addresses, have substantial research support. In the section on bulimia, for example, Logue does not discuss the anxiety-based conceptualization of this problem, namely that vomiting allows escape from the anxiety generated by bingeing, or the fairly successful exposure-with-response-prevention treatment to which this conceptualization has given rise (Leitenberg, Rosen, Gross, Nudelman, & Vara, 1988).

A third item that is a problem from an academic perspective is what might be called an excess of heuristics. Early in the book, Logue discusses criticisms of the terms impulsiveness and self-control and argues that one reason they should be retained is that they have heuristic value. That is, they suggest experiments and applications. Indeed, this is often touted as a positive feature of a term or concept in psychology. The dual-store model of memory is an example that readily comes to mind; we often hear that it helps to generate experiments. But surely this can be taken too far. Surely it is not a virtue to generate conceptualization after conceptualization, experiment after experiment, or application after application without regard to the value of the conceptualizations, experiments, or applications being generated. The suggestive potential of the terms impulsiveness and self-control is well illustrated in this book, but Logue may have taken it too far. For example, is it really helpful to think of finding a less stressful job or putting a plastic mat in the bathtub as instances of self-control?

These problems make Logue's book less than satisfactory from an academic perspective. But, as explained earlier, the book has potential as a popular volume. A revision that cuts back on Parts

I and II and has a lot more pictures and diagrams could be a hit. Is self-control a catholicon? No, but it could have a good run on the talk-show circuit just the same.

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