alectic. Extreme theses and antitheses garner more attention, increase citation rates, and sell books. But they are rarely correct. In the end, questions that are originally formulated in terms of (false) dichotomies (e.g., "Is conscious will real or an illusion?") usually end up being formulated in more complex ways that recognize some kind of synthesis in which a statement is not true or false, but rather, true to some extent, under certain circumstances (Sternberg 1999).

None of my argument takes away from the value of Wegner's most impressive research program. But I believe it does call into question what may be an overly simplistic interpretation of the results. Conscious will is not an illusion. It is not a simple reality. It is part of a complex and multifaceted causal chain that cannot, in the end, relieve us of responsibility for our own actions.

Wegner's "illusion" anticipated: Jonathan Edwards on the will

Ryan D. Tweney and Amy B. Wachholtz

Department of Psychology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403. **tweney@bgnet.bgsu.edu** **amywach@bgnet.bgsu**
http://personal.bgsu.edu/~tweney

Abstract: Wegner's *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (2002) ignores an important aspect of the history of the concept: the determinism of Jonathan Edwards (1754) and the later response to this determinism by William James and others. We argue that Edwards's formulation, and James's resolution of the resulting dilemma, are superior to Wegner's.

In 1754, Jonathan Edwards published his epochal *Freedom of the Will.* Edwards, a strict Calvinist predestinarian, sought to reconcile the omnipotence of a deity that directed and foresaw all future events, the "universal determining providence," with the need to regard people as moral agents who could be praised or blamed for their actions. Edwards rejected the idea of an autonomous "free" will (which he saw as inconsistent with divine omnipotence), and instead located human action within a deterministic network of unfolding events; a systemic model of the causation of behavior in which the force of the "apparent good" of an action was, like the force of gravity in planetary motion, the impetus for all behavior (Edwards 1754/1957). All ultimate causation was both divine and divinely foretold, and the unfolding of human action was both part of a dynamic system and completely determined.

Edwards's book opened 150 years of debate in America about the nature and existence of "free will," an important debate in a liberalizing age that moved past the strict Calvinism of Edwards. Many of the opponents of determinism (e.g., Catherine Beecher and Rowland Hazard) appealed to the strong personal awareness of self-agency. Free will was self-evident, to be found in the consciousness of effort that accompanied all exertion of will. Such consciousness *could not,* so the argument went, be illusory, a claim that, as for Wegner, seemed wide open for psychological debunking.

The issue weighed especially heavily on William James, for whom all of science seemed to point to a strictly determined will. Yet this was an idea that led him into a stifling depression, one he mastered, as he tells us in an 1870 diary entry, by asserting his first great pragmatic formulation: "The first act of free will is to believe in free will" (H. James 1920, p. 147). This characteristically Jamesian solution was a pragmatic stance that resolved his amotivational depression and eventuated in his later philosophical and psychological positions (James 1890). James's "solution" to Edwards's dilemma effectively closed the debate begun in 1754, and since then free will has been only a minor topic in psychology.

Wegner tells his readers nothing of this history, although it is directly relevant to many of the issues he raises. Thus, consider Edwards's claim that "The will is as the greatest apparent good." (Edwards 1754/1957, p. 142). The phrasing was carefully explained: there is a seamless connection between the perception of an action as good at the moment and the carrying out of the action itself; each "is as" the other. Edwards used the example of a drunkard sitting before a drink; if the drunkard drinks, it is because drinking appears as the greatest good at the time. If the drunkard abstains, then abstinence appears as the greatest good at the time. Either way, perception of the greatest good and the action are inseparable. Edwards rejected any notion of the will as an *efficient* cause, that is, as a mechanistic prior event, a motivational "cue ball" hitting an actionable "eight ball" (Tweney 1997). Human action – the perception of an action and its carrying out – were instead parts of a whole. The drunkard does not "freely choose" to drink. Instead, bad character and the proximal situation determine the drinking, just as, were the character good, abstinence would prevail.

Consider now Wegner's definition of the experience of will: "Will is experienced as the result of self-perceived apparent mental causation" (pp. 65–66). This resembles Edwards's "The will *is as* the greatest apparent good," but it muddles the causal issues. Note that Wegner sets up his definition by referring first to a billiard ball notion of causality (see p. 64), as if that were the only kind of causation possible. This is not like Edwards's systemic determinism, in which the perception of the apparent good and the action are distinct but inseparable parts of a whole. The result is that Wegner fights, yet again, the old battle about the causal efficacy of the "feeling" of will. His book takes on the task of proving once and for all, that the *feeling* of will is illusory. This ignores the deep dilemma set by Edwards, as well as the elegance of the resolution proffered by James. Edwards needed a deterministic will because he sought a theocratic social order in which the "Elect" could lead the damned and continue to praise or blame both damned and Elect alike. In the post-James era, by contrast, we can see that the cultural and political construct of free will is essential in a free society, even as it is superfluous in psychology.

It might be claimed that Wegner brings a fresh approach, in that the kinds of social psychological experiments used by Wegner to support his claims were not available in the first debate over the existence and nature of free will. Unfortunately, the obvious potential problems with such experiments are not discussed – response bias, demand characteristics, and the like. Even in the case of hypnosis, don't subjects consciously choose to relinquish control over their actions? Wegner seems to assume that to "prove" conscious will, the individual must have full control over every minor action. Thus, when people perform actions under hypnosis that seem out of their control, this is taken as proof of his theory. However, if the loss of some control proves against free will, regaining some must prove for it. Thus, we could prove that there *is* free will by pointing to biofeedback studies in which people can learn (within limits) to control their own autonomic functions, such as heartbeat. In fact, there is no proof either way, since the construct of "free will" is not a psychological construct.

Finally, what of Wegner's moral claim? In the end, quoting James, Wegner brings in character as the warrant for praise and blame (p. 324), dismissing free will as a potential psychological mechanism (but then why include all the experimental studies?), while reasserting the importance of the now-illusory emotion: "Conscious will is the somatic marker of personal authorship . . . that authenticates the action's owner as the self" (p. 327). Free will is a *positive* illusion for Wegner – a signpost of reality, a mood enhancer, supplemented perhaps by a new kind of Zen-like resignation. This is a new predestination, perfectly appropriate to a psychologized society of isolated selves fantasizing control over their own fates; the illusion that because things seem to be so, then they are so. Do we have a "new Calvinism" here, one in which a psychological "Elect" can praise and blame those fooled by their own illusions of free will?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X04410152 Published online by Cambridge University Press