

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – The Illusion of Conscious Will

Reviewer name: Scott Main

Book title: The Illusion of Conscious Will

Author name: Daniel M. Wegner

Genre: Psychology & Neuroscience

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief summary:

Nothing is more natural than to believe we have conscious control over our choices. Indeed most of social behaviour and our social institutions, including the criminal justice system, are predicated on that conviction. Otherwise how could we be held responsible for our actions? Harvard professor of psychology Daniel Wegner (d.2013) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Wegner) argues that our actions 'happen to us' rather than us being in control of them. Wegner is no lightweight and he provides a wealth of experimental data in support of his view. Wegner examines the issue from a variety of angles. He looks at well known illusions of the will – those cases where people feel that they are willing an act that they are not doing or, conversely, are not willing an act that they in fact are doing. He explores conscious will in hypnosis, Ouija board spelling, automatic writing, and facilitated communication, as well as in such phenomena as 'spirit possession', dissociative identity disorder, and 'trance channeling'. The book fully explores the operative effects in our lives of the illusion of conscious will. The suspicion that free will is an illusion has even made it into the mainstream media. Have a look at (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-23666726>). See what you think. If Wegner is right your reaction will be out of your control. Check your local library catalogue or further bibliographic detail here (https://www.amazon.co.uk/Illusion-Conscious-Will-MIT-Press/dp/0262534924/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=illusion+of+conscious+will&qid=1588054222&sr=8-1) 419 pages in Bradford Books paperback edition ISBN 978-0262731621

What you liked: The carefully presented evidence that conscious will is an illusion

Who should read this book?: Anyone who believes they make free choices