

## ***Will-training between Religion and Psychology in the Early Twentieth Century***

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### **Abstract**

Edward Boyd Barrett (1883-1966) was a psychologist who wrote a practical will-psychology, *Strength of Will*, in two versions: the first in 1915 as a Jesuit teaching at Clongowes Wood College in Ireland, and the second in 1931, having broken with the Jesuits and conducting psychoanalysis in New York City. In both versions, scientific psychology and Catholic teachings contributed to the theory and practices of will-training. Boyd Barrett's treatment of will-training is situated in the context of its time, one in which the will was of great importance for character formation, education, medicine, and psychology. The roots of will-training are found in Catholic ascetical practices as well as in scientific psychology.

**Keywords:** will, will-training, Edward Boyd Barrett, Jesuits, psychoanalysis

### ***El lugar del entrenamiento de la voluntad en la religión y la psicología en el temprano siglo veinte***

### **Resumen**

Edward Boyd Barrett (1883-1966) fue un psicólogo que escribió una psicología de la voluntad titulada *La fuerza de la voluntad*. Escribió dos versiones: la primera en 1915 cuando era jesuita y mientras enseñaba en la universidad irlandesa Clongowes Wood College y la segunda en 1931, después de haber dejado a la orden jesuita y mientras practicaba el psicoanálisis en la ciudad de Nueva York. En las dos versiones, la psicología científica y las enseñanzas católicas contribuían a la teoría y práctica del entrenamiento de la voluntad. Su tratamiento del entrenamiento de la voluntad se sitúa en el contexto

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de su tiempo, uno en que la voluntad tenía una importancia significativa para la formación de carácter, la educación, la medicina, y la psicología. Las raíces del entrenamiento de la voluntad se encuentran tanto en las prácticas ascéticas católicas como en la psicología científica.

**Palabras claves:** voluntad, entrenamiento de la voluntad, Edward Boyd Barrett, orden jesuita, psicoanálisis

***La place de "l'entraînement de la volonté"; entre religion et psychologie au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle***

**Résumé**

Edward Boyd Barrett (1883-1966) fut un psychologue d'origine irlandaise et l'auteur d'un système d'entraînement de la volonté, qu'il appela Strength of Will ("la force de la volonté") et qu'il publia en deux versions à deux moments différents de sa vie: une fois en 1915, alors qu'il était un Jésuite enseignant au Clongowes Wood College en Irlande, et une autre fois en 1931, lorsque, sorti de la Société, il pratiquait la psychanalyse à New York City. Dans l'une et l'autre version, la psychologie scientifique aussi bien que la doctrine catholique ont leur part. L'entraînement de la volonté tel que Boyd Barrett le conçoit s'explique en partie à la lumière d'idées en vigueur au début du siècle dernier, qui insistaient sur le rôle joué par la volonté dans le formation du caractère, dans l'éducation, dans la médecine et dans la psychologie. Mais à l'examen il se trouve que le système de Boyd Barrett s'enracine autant dans l'ascèse catholique traditionnelle que dans la psychologie scientifique du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle commençant.

**Mots-clés:**

volonté, entraînement de la volonté, Edward Boyd Barrett, Jésuites, psychanalyse

## ***Will-training between Religion and Psychology in the Early Twentieth Century***

*“Will-training ... should be something natural to Catholics.”*  
(Barrett, 1917b, p. 7)

Early in the twentieth century, an experimental psychology of the will flourished, producing practical manuals of will-training as well. The latter were consonant with the dominant culture, as they addressed concerns about character formation, psychotherapy, medicine, education, and the kinds of traits needed for success in a commercial society. There was also a religious dimension to will-psychology. In Catholic contexts, it drew upon centuries of ascetical religious theories and practices. In this context, will-training sought victory for duty in its struggle with desire. Will-training was a deliberate effort to reform human nature, to subdue its passions, and conform it to duty. Catholic will-psychologists, such as, Johannes Lindworsky (1875-1939), a German Jesuit experimental psychologist and author of *The Training of the Will* (1929), Thomas Verner Moore (1877-1969), an American priest, psychologist, and psychiatrist, whose *Dynamic Psychology* (1924) addressed the will, and an Irish Jesuit psychologist, Edward Boyd Barrett, saw their work as providing Catholic practices with scientific support. Boyd Barrett's *Strength of Will* (1915) was a case in point. What gives this text added interest is that after moving from Ireland to New York City, leaving the Jesuits under distressing circumstances, and practicing psychoanalysis, he wrote a second edition (Barrett, 1931), stripping out the overt religious content of the earlier edition and appealing to a secular American readership. After providing background on will-psychology, I will contrast the first and second editions of the book, to see what changed and what remained the same, what constituted a religious appeal and what a secular appeal in psychology in the first decades of the twentieth century. This case study illuminates some of the complexities among scientific psychology, religious practices, and cultural presuppositions early in the twentieth century.

### ***A Culture of the Will***

In the nineteenth century, the will was central to conceptions of human nature. An Irish educational reformer, Thomas Wyse (1791-1862), wrote *Education Reform* (1836), thoroughgoing but not particularly original (Castle, 1958). The book makes a good point of departure. Wyse saw moral training as necessary to the education of children, and “the core of moral training ... is religion” ( p. 226). Moral training means training the will, because “*Will* is CHARACTER; in the language of the world, it is the *MAN* himself” (Wyse, p.

228, emphasis in the original). For Wyse, weakness of will produced slavishness or unbridled licentiousness; so the first moral and religious duty is “to *strengthen* the Will” (p. 230) of the child, in order to foster “mastery and management of himself” (p. 231). To strengthen the will, exercise in willing is necessary. “When decision is requisite, the child should be *required* to decide; the necessity of deciding gives decision: the faculty becomes active instead of passive” (p. 233). An American Protestant minister, Pharcellus Church (1801-1886), argued for the training of the will for both power and submission: “The real end of an education is, to increase the power of the will over the other faculties” in order to “enable [the child] to concentrate his mental, moral, and physical force upon the end to which he devotes his life” (1844, p. 354-55). Church emphasized that exercise is as necessary for will-training as it is for the development of the muscles or any talent; the will is trained by observing one’s duties and realizing one’s dependence on God. Wyse and Church are but two examples from an ocean of advice.

The stress on the will was tinged with anxiety. Oppenheim (1991) observes that the will was a staple of nineteenth-century medical discourse. Physicians knew there were moral causes of disease. Without the will regulating emotions and impulses, character crumbled and ill-health threatened. Cowan (2008) expresses the dilemma of the age: “modern nervousness represented the product of a psychic conflict particular to the modern bourgeoisie: a conflict between, on the one hand, the insistence on the individual’s autonomy and self-reliance and, on the other, the increasing awareness of the individual’s dependency on mysterious and uncontrollable economic forces” (p. 30). Indeed, defects of the will provided a major way to organize psychopathology at the time. *Abulia*, or loss of will, was a significant diagnosis in the work of Théodule Ribot (1903) and Pierre Janet (1901). Weakness of will could produce a variety of disorders, including neurasthenia, the catch-all category of the day. When neurasthenia was first described, it was associated with the middle classes, who were feeling the “wear and tear of modern life,” to use Weir Mitchell’s (1871) phrase. In other words, it affected those who saw the value of willpower and the training of the will.

Related to this direct training of the will was body-building, including nineteenth-century “muscular Christianity,” which stressed fitness of body as expressive of moral development (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005). In general, “physical exercise was part of a project to build up the ‘will’ of individual students” (Churchill, 2008, p. 364). Indeed, practices derived from physical education were directly incorporated into will-training, when the latter was differentiated from—and not conflated with—the former in the development of character.

The will was highly contested ground. For many religious writers, self-will was the basis for rebellion against divine will, and submission to God’s will was the key to the good

life. "Restraint and self-sacrifice" (Reed, 1989, p. 44) were essential to good and manly character. While there was ample debate over the freedom of the will, attention to the power of the will held the philosophical questions at arm's length, such that even naturalists, such as Thomas Henry Huxley, could assert the importance of self-direction and self-control (Smith, 2013).

### ***Will-training in Catholic Contexts***

In the religious sphere, the will was strongly accented. Since Boyd Barrett was a Jesuit, I limit my remarks to the Catholic, Thomistic view of the will and its implications for will-training. Michael Maher, SJ, a Thomistic psychologist, and Joseph Bolland, SJ, wrote on the will "in its psychological aspect," defining it summarily as "the faculty of choice" (Maher & Bolland, 1912, p. 624). Like Wyse and others, Maher and Bolland tied will to character, although instead of stressing strength of will, they linked will to reason and self-control:

As reason develops ... the power of resistance to impulse grows. Each passing inclination, inhibited for the sake of a more durable good or more abstract motive, involves an increase in the power of self-control. The child becomes able to withstand temptation in obedience to precepts or in accordance with general principles. The power of steady adhesion to fixed purposes grows and, by repeated voluntary acts, habits are formed which in the aggregate constitute formed character. (pp. 625-626)

From the Catholic viewpoint, as expressed by Edward Aloysius Pace (1909), a priest, a psychologist who studied with Wundt, and a Thomistic philosopher, the practice of religion was essential to the education of the will:

Training in religion ... furnishes the best motives for conduct and the noblest ideals for imitation, while it sets before the mind an adequate sanction in the holiness and justice of God. Religious education, it should be noted, is more than instruction in the dogmas of faith or the precepts of the Divine law; it is essentially a practical training in the exercises of religion, such as prayer, attendance at Divine worship, and reception of the sacraments. By these means conscience is purified, the will to do right is strengthened, and the mind is fortified to resist those temptations which ... threaten the gravest danger to the moral life. (p. 304)

While cultivation of the will entailed reason, good habits were also necessary, and religious obligations placed upon Catholics instilled those habits. Unlike some their secular contemporaries, then, the Catholic view stressed discipline and self-control rather than power of will per se.

As an example of will-training from a religious perspective, we turn to one of the important manuals of Catholic ascetical theology in the first half of the twentieth century, *The Spiritual Life* (Tanquerey, 1930). The book, primarily used by priests and nuns for guidance in their spiritual lives, addressed will-training under the heading of mortification, defined as “the struggle against our evil inclinations in order to subject them to the will, and the will to God” (p. 364). In the modern era, Tanquerey wrote, training of the will was a rough synonym for mortification, an older term carrying the meaning of dying to one’s self so that one can live in God. Practices of mortification were more extensive than those directed to the will. Mortification opposed the pleasures, especially when sought as ends in themselves (p. 371). There were mortification of the senses, of memory and imagination, of the passions, of the intellect, as well as of the will. To train the will, one must avoid “lack of reflection,” “over-eagerness which ... depletes the energies of body and soul, and often causes us to stray in the direction of evil,” and lack of self-confidence. Dangerous also is “*human respect*, which makes us slaves of other men and causes us to stand in fear of their criticisms or their mockery” (p. 390). In addition to avoiding such dangers, Tanquerey advised attention to basic Christian convictions, providing a brief list as aids to memory, in a manner that resembled the maxims given by promoters of auto-suggestion, such as Émile Coué (1922). Coupled with these reminders was a specific practice, daily examination of conscience. “In order to succeed in this, I shall frequently repeat the words of St. Paul at the moment of his conversion: ‘*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*’ In the evening, in my examination of conscience, I shall reproach myself for the least failing” (p. 390). These actions must take place “with *decision, firmness, and constancy*” (pp. 390-391), echoing, especially with “firmness,” the popular conception of willpower during this time (Kugelmann, 2013). I would be remiss and imply Pelagianism—the position that through our deeds alone, without God’s grace, we can attain to virtue and salvation—in Tanquerey, if I did not mention he emphasized that strength of will, meaning the subjection of the passions and submission to Divine will, was impossible without the grace of God.

### ***Practical Will-training in the Early Twentieth Century***

Detailed, step-by-step regimens already existed before 1900, to be sure, in military training, athletic training, and in spiritual training, in particular in Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. This book, written between 1522 and 1524 by the founder of the Jesuits, specifies the spiritual activities to be done during a 30-day period of time apart from one’s regular life. Also at the turn of the twentieth century, body-building techniques, in gymnastics and other sports, came into prominence, isolating muscles and mechanically developing their strength. Finally, at the time, manuals that taught self-help, including will-training, began to draw increasingly on the procedural forms of scientific psychology (Maasen, 2007).

Writers such as Frank Channing Haddock (1853-1915), in *Power of Will* (1909), recommended “systematic exercises” (Reed, p. 78) to develop the will. Haddock was associated with the New Thought movement, a secularized spirituality, and *Power of Will*, a best-seller in the US and England (Meyer, 1980), was one of a number of self-help books he wrote. The development of procedural approaches to strength of will was a hallmark of the new century. Citing many of the leading figures in the new scientific psychology, Haddock (1909) sought to instruct readers to develop strength of will for success, never neglecting to combine strength of will with righteousness. Quoting the British psychologist, James Sully, that the “Will grows by exercise” (p. 61), Haddock detailed exercises that were promised to have precisely that consequence. Such recommendations pervaded the culture of self-mastery. As an example of Haddock's recommendations, here is one for the development of attention:

*Exercise No. 3* Permit the mind to wander whither it will one minute. Now write out all that you recall of these wandering thoughts. Then proceed to find and indicate in writing the connections that bind them into a chain. You will thus discover that mental activities may become aimless, but that the mind's roaming is not without explanation. Resolve to keep your thoughts well in hand. Repeat these exercises six times, and continue for ten days, with rest. On the tenth day compare records and note improvement in attention. Try, now, to discover any general laws that have governed the mind's uncontrolled action. (pp. 199-200)

The essential elements of will-training were here: the importance of development of habit, the necessity of mechanical repetition, the belief that activity itself is the will doing its work of willing.

What was novel was the psychological justification, not the exercises per se. That such exercises for strengthening of the will were already circulating, is evident from a Catholic critique of moral writings from 1879:

Exercise your will in doing disagreeable things. Force yourself to get out of bed on a cold night, and to stand on one leg in your room. Run around the corner in your bare head and slippers, and face the ridicule of the passers-by. If you prefer one side of the street, take the other. Try to like people whom you naturally detest. Bring the will up with a jerk, if you find it disposed to shrink. Be of good courage when you hear people speaking of you as obstinate and mulish, for it is a sure sign that you are advancing in will-power. (Gospel of Hygiene, pp. 233-234)

These satirical recommendations suggest that will-training at the time was modeled on physical training. Indeed, this article ridicules advice books by stating “Whatever virtues you practice, never omit your practice of the dumb-bells” (Gospel of Hygiene, p. 234). Gymnastic training was important as a model for how to develop habits and strengthen native abilities.

Because he drew upon the ideas of the work of Hippolyte Bernheim and Paul Emile Lévy, who theorized that hypnosis can be explained by suggestion, Richard John Ebbard’s *How to Acquire and Strengthen Will-Power: Modern Psycho-Therapy* (1907) provides an example of an attempted integration of modern psychology with the self-help genre. The purpose of the book was to give “some practical hints as to Self-treatment by Self-suggestion” (p. x). Significant were detailed instructions to strengthen the will. The key to the practice was suggestion, which creates motives for action, he claimed. According to Ebbard, suggestion focuses the attention, and attention directs nerve action. Patients see or hear suggestions, even those self-induced, and when these nerve circuits have been activated, they spread out to vegetative neural circuitry beyond the pale of consciousness. That was how suggestion was supposed to treat neurasthenic complaints.

With this rationale, Ebbard presented his “practical psychology” (p. 119) of Self-Suggestion, consisting of several stages. In one of them, “*the subject should behave and act just as if he were already placed in the condition in which he desires to be*” (p. 118). Ebbard, following Lévy, called this stage “psychical gymnastics.” When done oneself, he wrote, the subject becomes his own “trainer” (p. 116). Ebbard pointed out that we already do this “auto-suggestion in action” (p. 111) in everyday courtesy and in religious rituals, where we act the part, and then get in the proper mood and think the proper thoughts. The training detailed how many times one should repeat a suggestion, how long one should dwell on the suggestions, how one should divert one’s thoughts to other topics after making suggestions to oneself. In addition, Ebbard provided “Suggestion Tables” which specified these four steps, with distinct suggestions for each condition addressed. In this way, one becomes master of oneself. The power of self-suggestion, according to Ebbard, “is unlimited, and with this power grows our self-confidence and strength of will” (p. 129). Ebbard’s book exemplifies the type of will-training of the epoch, with at least a scientific veneer, programmatic in structure, drawing on gymnastics, psychology, and older forms of character formation.

### ***Boyd Barrett’s Strength of the Will***

Boyd Barrett’s *Strength of Will* (1915) brought these various currents together, combining traditional Catholic practices of mortification, will-psychology, a medical or therapeutic approach, and procedures for will-training. It presents an example of how



psychology could support religion, giving its morality renewed legitimation in the modern world, and how psychology could demonstrate its worth to religious people. Boyd Barrett wrote the book primarily for Catholic readers, many of whom were suspicious of the new experimental psychology. By several indicators, such as the support of his Order and favorable reviews in the Catholic press, Boyd Barrett succeeded in showing the value of psychology to many Catholics. Then, after his break with the Jesuits in 1925, and after a series of publications critical of the Jesuit order and some Church teachings—in particular on asceticism—a new edition of *Strength of Will* (1931) appeared. While addressing a broad American readership and stripped of most of the overtly Catholic references, the book nevertheless supported the same ideals of self-control and mortification that the earlier edition upheld. This was so despite drawing upon his six-year practice of what he called psychoanalysis.

### ***Brief Biography of Edward Boyd Barrett***

Edward Boyd Barrett (1883-1966) was an Irish-born Jesuit, psychologist, psychoanalyst, writer, and novelist. He entered the Jesuit order in 1904, and between 1908 and 1911, he studied experimental psychology at Louvain (Belgium) in Mercier's Institute of Philosophy, completing a dissertation (Barrett, 1911) under Albert Michotte in will-psychology, along the lines of Michotte and Prüm (1910). Upon return to Ireland, Boyd Barrett was Senior English Master at Clongowes Wood College; after that assignment, he studied theology at Milltown Park from 1914, and in 1917, he was ordained a priest (Barrett, 1930). He was approved to study psychology and biology in London in 1920, where he encountered psychoanalysis. While he attempted to promote the idea of the priest-psychotherapist, this idea was not to be, and upon return to Ireland in 1922, he was assigned to Mungret College. In 1924, he was sent to the United States, and again, his ideas for psychotherapy fell on rocky soil. In 1925, faced with a return home and no prospects for psychology, he left the Jesuits, although there is ambiguity on the extent to which he was forced out, directly or indirectly, and the extent to which he decided to leave. Between 1925 and the early 1930s, he practiced psychoanalysis (see Barrett, 1925), and wrote and lectured extensively. He later reconciled with the Church (Kugelmann, 2011).

### ***Will-Psychology as the Handmaiden of Religion***

After his return from Louvain, Boyd Barrett (1913, 1914a,b,c) wrote a series of articles on the education of the will for the *Irish Ecclesiastical Review*. *Strength of Will* (1915) repeated much of what those articles included. He also wrote briefer accounts, *The Will to Win* (1917a; 1917b) for children. While there had been controversy over the earlier publication of his dissertation and his later writings on psychoanalysis (Barrett, 1930), with these publications on the will, there was no or little opposition, suggesting that what he wrote was in harmony with the dominant strains of Catholic thought, even with

anxiety over modernism in psychology, as shown by some of the criticism of his other work. Moreover, his dissertation (Barrett, 1911) was favorably cited by Catholic reviewers. Because of its freedom, the will was “one of the least promising departments of mental life for the experimental psychologist,” wrote Maher and Bolland (1912, p. 626). However, experimental studies have proven valuable, even if “the quantity of new light they are likely to shed on all the more important questions connected to the human will, is still a matter of controversy” (p. 626). This cautious assessment suggests how volatile a subject psychology and especially will-psychology were among Catholic scholars and churchmen.

Since Boyd Barrett was a Jesuit, his writing had to be approved for publication by Jesuit censors and his Provincial.<sup>2</sup> The censorship process went smoothly. Boyd Barrett wrote to his Provincial describing the papers on the education of the will, stating “There is nothing sensational or very original in anything I have to say.... But it seems to me that there is a good opening for a few short articles on this subject as little has so far been written on it in Ireland.” Moreover, “I’m sure young priests at Maynooth etc., would find some useful information in these three papers.”<sup>3</sup> He saw this work as supporting the efforts of Catholic teachers and priests to form the characters of those in their care. Modern will-psychology was here a handmaiden of religion. The articles were published within a year of this letter, suggesting strong support on the part of the Provincial.

In 1914, Boyd Barrett sent the manuscript of *Strength of Will* to his Provincial in order to have it censored “as soon as possible.”<sup>4</sup> Two months later, he indicated that he had “changed chapter XIV in full accord with the recommendations of Censor.”<sup>5</sup> The chapter (in Barrett, 1915) that required re-writing was “The Will and Sensuality.” The conclusion of this chapter brought together his program for will-training and religious discipline:

To sum up, then, our views on the problem of the conquest of sensuality. To us the solution seems to lie in a good method of will-training inspired by and supported by religion. No doubt prudent education in moral doctrines is absolutely essential also. But the main force from within, which is to fight and win the battle against sensuality, is will-force, developed by methodical exercises, and inspired by religion. (p. 207)

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<sup>2</sup> “Provincial” here means the head of the Jesuit order for the Irish Province.

<sup>3</sup> Barrett, E. B. (12 November 1913). Letter to Father Provincial. Irish Jesuit Archives SC/CLON/S2(5).

<sup>4</sup> Barrett, E. B. (8 October 1914). Letter to Father Provincial [Nolan]. Irish Jesuit Archives FM/MILL/183(5).

<sup>5</sup> Barrett, E. B. (17 December 1914). Re—“Strength of Will.” Irish Jesuit Archives FM/MILL/183(8).

We see here, inspired in part by the qualms of the Censors, will-training yoked to traditional Catholic ideas of mortification.

At the other end of the publication process, reviews of *Strength of Will* by Catholic periodicals were favorable. *America*, the Jesuit magazine in the US, gave the book high praise for being “wisely conservative,” by which the reviewer meant that there was “little that is new.” The reviewer observed:

Those who have accustomed themselves to exercises of spiritual introspection ... will probably detect a striking resemblance between the exercises suggested by the author for improving the will, and the Ignatian exercise on the general and particular examination of conscience. ... [T]he novelty consisting in the fact that the exercises here indicated center round some indifferent act or acts. (J.A.C., 1916)

The *Catholic World* stated that *Strength of Will* should be “included in the reading of every priest” (Review of *Strength of Will*, 1916, p. 840). This review stated that the book “will be of very considerable value to persons who have been more or less upset by what they suppose to be a conflict between the findings of modern psychology and the traditional doctrines of Catholic philosophy” (p. 841). A *Prospectus* for the book included six favorable reviews from Catholic newspapers.<sup>6</sup>

Things also went well for *The Will to Win* (1917a). Barrett wrote that “Father Kearney (Spiritual Father at Blackrock College for 25 years) has kept urging me to write it.”<sup>7</sup> The Provincial approved the project, and Michael Browne, SJ, a Master of Novices noted for his personal asceticism (O’Rahilly, 1950), made corrections to the manuscript; Boyd Barrett promised his Provincial that he would send it to Father Browne for approval.<sup>8</sup> The Irish publisher suggested that he “make presentation copies to about forty prominent Catholic headmasters and laymen.”<sup>9</sup> Arrangements were made for the American version (Barrett, 1917b). The harmony among the censors and the reviewers indicates that this work on the will was found to be supportive of the Church’s efforts to promote the good life.

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<sup>6</sup> *Prospectus. Strength of will.* (1916). Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland. Irish Jesuit Archives N5/9(13).

<sup>7</sup> Barrett, E. B. (8 September 1916). Letter to Father Provincial [Nolan]. Irish Jesuit Archives FM/MILL/183(14).

<sup>8</sup> Barrett, E. B. (6 November 1916). Letter to Father Provincial [Nolan]. Irish Jesuit Archives FM/MILL/183(15).

<sup>9</sup> Barrett, E. B. (2 February 1917). Letter to Father Provincial [Nolan]. Irish Jesuit Archives FM/MILL/183(17).

***Strength of Will (1915): Bridging Psychology and Catholicism***

Boyd Barrett (1925) discussed the place of religious practices in the context of will-training. Indeed, religion provided the ideal form of will-training, because religion, “when faithfully and devoutly practiced, affords ... the best and surest means of psychical reeducation, for in religion, in meditation, prayer and mortification, all the mental faculties are exercised in a calm, joyous, peaceful spirit” (p. 152). Given the background of will-training in moral education, this comes as no surprise. Boyd Barrett’s (1915) *Strength of Will* blended together a self-help ethos with Thomistic philosophy, scientific psychology, step-by-step suggestions, and Jesuit ascetical spirituality. While he provided a Thomistic account of the will as “the faculty of inclining towards or striving after some object intellectually apprehended as good” (p. 41), he largely ignored the Thomistic emphasis on the unity of the soul and saw in the will a separable mental function. The will is “an instrument” (p. 19), one that can, much as a muscle, strengthen independently of other mental powers. In some passages, the will is an “it,” that one can assess, and in others, it is the core of the self (the following includes quotations from introspective reports of the experience of doing the exercise):

In making efforts we are intimately conscious that *now, somewhere within*, there is an active driving-force, tending outwards and onwards. ‘Something deep and strong and of worth.’ It is ‘something I have, yet which is myself.’ ‘It is not thought nor emotion nor feeling. Will-movement is something distinct from thought or emotion. It is a tendency of the soul with a consciousness of tending, and a warmth and colour about it.’ My will is I, an ‘active I’—‘not knowledge, nor image, nor feeling, nor sensation.’ (pp. 211-212)

In one sense, the will must be active in all our actions, but in another sense, it is not—at least not in its full force. In contrast to the will is sensuality, which means: “weakness and softness of character ... the direct antithesis of that spiritual strength and virility which accompanies will-power. To give way habitually to sensuality means the abandonment of self-control and the death of the will” (p. 195). For Boyd Barrett, strength of will had conventionally masculine qualities. Indeed, he specifies the epitome of the man of will in terms apparently meant to be taken at face-value: “Our lives will become more solitary and more independent. In spite of ourselves we shall grow somewhat cold and serious and rigid. Some of the flower and boom of our natural manner will be lost and we shall be less lovable” (pp. 54-55). He went further: “Those who admire us from afar will talk vaguely of telepathy, psychic influence and magnetism” (p. 55). To develop the will meant to fashion oneself according to a cultural model of ascetic masculinity. When Boyd Barrett wrote the book, he was still in training to become a Jesuit, and the book somewhat naively reflected his own situation, generalized for others. To some extent, however, he made the analogy between will-

training and his own spiritual formation explicit: “a Jesuit’s novice’s life ... is a method of will-training” (p.120).

Liberally seasoned with introspective reports, the book sought to make the reader aware of the experiential reality of the will. The core of the book was the method of will-training, which went beyond a general recommendation of “self-denial and mortification” (p. 115). Boyd Barrett referred to psychological authorities on will-training, including William James (1890), although the particulars of the method seem to be Boyd Barrett's own. They were modeled in part on methods of training the body. In particular, he referred to *Bodily Health and Spiritual Vigour* by William Lockington, SJ (1913), a book based on “Loyola’s spiritual exercises as a model for his psychosomatic program of motivational therapy based in bodily gymnastics” (Cowan, 2008, p. 124). However, gymnastic exercises do not suffice for will-training, because they have an ulterior motive of strengthening the muscles, and Boyd Barrett insisted that will-training should have no other motive than the will, because that keeps the mind focused on the will per se.

Boyd Barrett drew on Jules Payot’s (1909) *The Education of the Will* (also cited by Tanquerey). For Payot, “the most profound of the practical psychologists who have taken up the question of the education of the sentiments, Ignatius Loyola, as well as Pascal, recommended external acts of faith as very helpful in bringing the mind into a corresponding emotional state” (p. 93; see Cowan, 2008, p. 104). Indeed, “Loyola was ... widely accepted as the spiritual ancestor of will gymnastics” (Cowan, p. 105). While in keeping with the spirit of the founder of his order, Boyd Barrett offered what he saw as a scientific supplement, stripped bare of overt spiritual ends. The peculiarity of the will is that it is self-training: one wills to will. Boyd Barrett’s (1915) method had three stages: educative, curative, and strengthening and perfecting (p. 133). The first phase was designed to make a person aware of the will; the second, to correct one's own personal defects of will (impulsive, inactive, etc.). Boyd Barrett emphasized the importance of the triviality of the exercises, to avoid losing focus on willing to will. If the exercises are done consistently, one will experience “an increase in will-power and energy” (p. 141). The exercises constitute the external part of the work of the will; the internal part is “the activity of the will *in willing resolutely and contentedly*” (p. 168). Boyd Barrett recognized that will-training in this way was devoid of moral quality and that a strong will is not necessarily a good will, but he wrote that there was a larger purpose: “*the grand object of self-discipline is, in reality, to brace up the human will for the struggle of the moral life*” (p. 173).

The original part of the book was the recommendations for specific exercises, modeled on his experimental work. They had both behavioral and introspective components, the

basis for which was the position that the physical acts will instill the corresponding states of mind, an understanding consonant with both Ignatius and William James. As an example of the method, here is one of the recommendations for will-training: "Resolution, November 13, 1913. 'Each day for the next ten days I shall calmly and deliberately, without haste, replace in the box (one by one) the hundred bits of cardboard'" (pp. 154-55). This particular exercise was chosen to deal with an impatient will. Boyd Barrett provided an introspective account of actually doing this exercise, sometimes describing boredom and distraction, but ending with an upbeat note: "Self-control and self-command means that the will drives the human machine exactly and precisely along predetermined lines. Will is to control activity duly; well-regulated effort is its proper outcome" (p. 161). Lesson learned.

The outcome of such exercises: As the will grows stronger, "it begins to make attacks on luxuries, even legitimate luxuries, and awakens a tendency towards a 'hard' life. We begin to rid ourselves of what is unnecessary. Perhaps we give up smoking, drinking wine, and wearing luxurious clothing. ... Still the life of the will, inspired of course by religion, leads us further afield, and we strive to cultivate the higher virtues of manhood that mean self-perfection" (Barrett, 1915, p. 206). This text thus portrays techniques and rationales for molding one's self into an ideal self, a steely masculine self, whose determination drives the machinery of the body, who leads others who do not necessarily love him, but who respect him and find themselves under his influence.

Strength of will meant not only an ability to act with resolve, but in line with Catholic ascetical practices, it meant the "triumph of the will" (Boyd Barrett, 1915, p. 205), that is, chastity or the conquest of sensuality. The book was meant to "aid religion in its work of fortifying the souls of the young against evil" (p. 199). In this way, Boyd Barrett proposed a scientific method of will-training that supplemented a traditional Catholic way of life.

### ***Strength of Will (1931)***

Between the two versions of *Strength of Will*, Boyd Barrett broke with the Jesuits, and he published searing criticisms of his own order (Barrett, 1927). He began a practice in psychoanalysis, although his was not an orthodox version of the Freudian system. He combined psychoanalysis, by which he meant an anamnesis of the patient's life, with other practices, including will-training, which he argued was necessary for the life-changes to take effect. "The Psychoanalysis of Asceticism" (Barrett, 1929) was an implicit re-assessment of some of his earlier views in the 1915 *Strength of Will*. He addressed the distinction between types of mortification, the older one being directed against the flesh, and "the more recent one, which came into vogue with the Jesuit movement; 'the mortification of the spirit,' that is of the will and judgment" (p. 495) He

depicted the practices derived from Ignatius as “crushing the will” (p. 496) by goading the young to submerge their desires and thoughts and to obey their superiors: “Ascetes of the Jesuit school rarely preserve their native frankness and independence of mind; still more rarely do they maintain their individuality” (p. 496). This passage in effect restated the outcome of will-training. Whereas earlier he had positively claimed that will-training made one “less lovable,” now he wrote that modern asceticism or will-training was based on a “power-complex.” Conquest of sensuality makes the ascete “lord and master of his own little kingdom” (p. 502). Implicitly tying together his own Jesuit training with his 1915 book, he concluded:

My personal recollection of ascetical days is to the effect that we young monks, in fasting, wearing hair-shirts, taking disciplines, and mortifying ourselves in other ways, felt we were increasing our power ‘*in influence others.*’ ... [W]e sought in asceticism what is called in popular magazine language *magnetic power*” (p. 503)

His Jesuit training as depicted went beyond anything he recommended in *Strength of Will*, to be sure, but the desired outcome, as stated there, included this “magnetic power” over others, by virtue of self-control. No doubt, a Tanquerey would object that Boyd Barrett’s ideal was a perversion of ascetical training. So it is interesting to see if and how the 1931 edition of *Strength of Will* reflected this change in thinking.

The new version of *Strength of Will* stripped most of the religious language from the book. Moreover, it did not address primarily a Catholic audience, but instead appealed to a general American readership. The central message, however, remained the same; it still combined resolve and self-control. In spite of his 1929 article, the book began with a defense of asceticism. What he called “the pathology of self-expression” (p. ix) did not free people. His psychoanalytic practice showed him the necessity of repression, of “self-renunciation” (p. 8), for a life worth living. Hence, he decided to re-publish his book, with “its central idea ... intact but ... garbed anew” (p. x), a fair assessment of what he did. He was critical of what he deemed a fad of “self-expression,” which meant the indulgence of impulses and desires.<sup>10</sup> Self-control and self-discipline, including in matters sexual, were the guidance he recommended, and will-training was the way to thus develop our better selves. So while the explicitly religious had been removed, the underlying Catholic ascetical approach to living remained.

Two significant changes were the dropping of overtly Thomistic terms and the inclusions of psychoanalytic categories, especially the unconscious. The “man of strong will” is

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<sup>10</sup> Probably he was referring to the promotion of sexual freedom in articles, such as Samuel D. Schmalhausen’s (1929) “The Sexual Revolution,” from the same book that included Boyd Barrett’s (1929) chapter on asceticism.

someone who can draw force from “the roots of the will ... far down in obscure regions of the unconscious” (p. 13). Boyd Barrett liberally sprinkled in material drawn from his own practice of psychoanalysis to show how will-training is important in psychotherapy. In place of the chapter, “Religion and Will-Training” in the 1915 book, we find “Be Yourself” in 1931. But this self that one should be is not the self of self-expression; it is the self that results from the pursuit of the higher things:

The slogan Be-Yourself implies at once the repression of merely wayward impulses and the shedding of unjustifiable shackles. To attain the greatest possible enrichment of one’s personality one must be free from outward and inward tyranny and one must use the qualities of good sense and good taste. ... [I]f he views his life as having a definite purpose and a special meaning and if he regards humanity in general as having a noble destiny, he will not be without ambition to strive for the achievement of that fine personal creation, the perfect self. (p. 27)

But how different is this “perfect self” from Boyd Barrett’s earlier depiction?

In discussing the meaning of his program for will-training, Boyd Barrett modified his conception of asceticism. While he continued to stress self-control, he claimed that earlier books on will-training were “inclined to place too much emphasis on the element of self-renunciation” (p. 87). Self-renunciation is still necessary, he wrote, but not sufficient. Someone with a strong will “needs to be able to express an affirmative. ... He needs the power of making efforts of pouring out his energy in positive decisions, of facing hard and trying tasks of constructiveness” (pp. 87-88). Still, strength of will means mastery of desires—but not renunciation of all of them. He then rewrote his vision of the ideal:

The man of strong will is more truly a man than any other. He is lord and master of himself. He is sole ruler of his own forces. He knows his own mind and recognizes his own power. ... On the whole, his preference is for the simple life, for the sincerity of chosen friends, for the practice of honesty and courage in all affairs. (pp. 91-92)

He did not reject his earlier depiction entirely, for he characterized men of strong will as leaders, heroes, supermen (p. 93). He warned that “a resurgence of the emotion of fear often breaks the strongest will. Fear of a woman’s scorn has broken many a man” (p. 93). His ideal remained firmly a masculine stereotype, someone above the ordinary cut of men, self-governing and governing others. Gone, however, was mention of being less lovable, although one might argue that this depiction of this heroic type leaves little of the so-called softer virtues intact.



In place of a chapter on sensuality there now stands “The Will and Sex.” While explicitly religious appeals were not made, there was a lament that “our traditions of social decency have been imperiled, and above all things else we are fast losing the old ideals of self-renunciation and self-control” (p. 149). He presented three scenarios—all of women—to show that “in the conflict between sex and will, perhaps the ultimate conflict in human nature, there can be no half-measures” (p. 153). When faced with sexual temptations—fornication, adultery, and homosexuality (he did not use these terms but they are implied)—only the “trained will” can help “in the agony of struggle” (p. 153). Whereas in the earlier version he would have appealed also to the help that religion—including the sacrament of confession—could provide, here he focused on the will alone. His advice was as follows:

Sex has its place in human life and it must be kept in that place. It is not shameful in itself. ... But unbridled sex makes a man’s life a lie. Uncontrolled sex tends directly to effeminacy, dilatoriness and deceit: sometimes it leads directly to crime. The will, on the other hand, stands for the hard life, the life of action, the life which is controlled and governed by reason. (p. 154)

In all things but an explicitly religious reference, this statement corresponded to Catholic moral teachings.

In the final chapter, “The Meaning of Life,” he stressed the importance of a purpose for one’s life. He acknowledged that he “deliberately prescinded from the religious aspects, and even the moral aspects of the problem” (p. 184). He instead used “plain sense” for the “plain man” (pp. 184-85) to make his case, admitting that for religious people strength of will helps in the attaining of virtue. In a review of the book by the Catholic periodical *Fortnightly Review*, the only discussion is of this “prescinded” passage: “By a strange irony, Mr. Barrett’s revised book is criticized by a Liberal Protestant review, the *Christian Century* ... for the reason that, when such eminent physicians as Dr. Wm. Brown of London and Dr. Richard Cabot of Boston ... insist upon the therapeutic value of religion, it is strange to find an erstwhile theologian that can ignore this important factor” (Notes and gleanings, 1932, p. 67). This review introduced Boyd Barrett as “the ex-Jesuit,” referring to his book by that name (the British edition of *The Magnificent Illusion*), thus invoking the scathing Catholic criticism of much of what Boyd Barrett wrote in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

**Conclusion: Asceticism in a secular world.**

Whereas the 1915 edition of *Strength of Will* incorporated modern psychology into a Catholic milieu, grounding it philosophically in Thomistic thought and proposing practices in keeping with Catholic moral teaching—indeed, requiring religious practices

for their completion—in the 1931 version, we find an appeal made on the basis of an appeal to scientific psychological principles and to a conception of American society and its values. Nevertheless, the practices and the underlying conception of human nature remained the same. There was still, although here tacitly, support for Catholic teachings. To live a good life, ascetical training is necessary, so that the higher self can subdue the passions. In both editions, Boyd Barrett promoted the development of coolly rigid masculinity. Moreover, Boyd Barrett's psychology was still in the service of the Catholic religion. Except for one point, and that one was made by the *Fortnightly Review*. From the perspective of his Catholic contemporaries, Boyd Barrett had left out the most important thing: the centrality of religious training for the training of the will. It was not enough to be compatible with Catholic teaching in 1932 to be truly compatible with it: one must be explicitly consonant with it. The heightened individualism of the 1931 version of the book, moreover, because it avoided explicitly religious demands, served to obscure the fact that will-training did presuppose obedience to a social regimen that required one to submerge individual desires and thoughts, as he stated the case in his 1929 article. In these ways, we see one example of how psychology modernized religious practices early in the twentieth century.

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