

*Understanding Human Motivation*  
*What Makes People Tick?*

Donald Laming

 **Blackwell**  
Publishing



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350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA  
108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK  
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

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# PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

What makes people tick? Why do people do what they do? I set out to write a book on human motivation and found that those questions could not be satisfactorily answered by themselves. *Homo sapiens* is the most advanced, the most complex, most adaptable, and most intelligent of all biological species, but is still a biological species. One must therefore expect people to display instinctive patterns of behavior like those which ensure the continuing survival of all subhuman species. But we do not feel as if our behavior is instinctive, mechanical, switched on by circumstances outside of us; we feel, instead, that we are *choosing* what to do. So I am immediately involved with the apparent irreconcilability of determinism and free will.

I have also to be concerned with the nature of consciousness. We sometimes feel angry or afraid or excited and those feelings color what we do, even to the point of sometimes doing things we did not intend. Do other people feel emotions in the same way as I do? and how are those internal feelings related to what I see them do? Boredom, for example, we know as a subjective malaise, but that feeling has much in common with the frustration of other, more obvious, motivations. So we have, on the one hand, what people *say* they feel and, on the other, what they are actually seen to do, such as injecting drugs. We need to trace a relationship between these two accounts.

There is also the notion of *responsibility*. Except for those who are certified insane, each of us is responsible at law for our actions and, more immediately, we have moral obligations to those around us, especially our close families. So why is it that we do not routinely cheat and defraud and rob each other? Indeed, there are a few people who do just that! That is a profound problem and the pronouncements of religious leaders and philosophers do not provide the answer. The standards of behavior which obtain in our society and the way in which those standards are enforced are of great importance to what people do, and do not do, and I cannot but be concerned with the psychological foundations of ethical behavior. An enquiry into human motivation must therefore involve itself with many derivative questions and becomes, like it or not, a study of the entire human condition.

By *motivation* I mean the initiation of quasi-mechanical behavior, and it needs to be emphasized straight away that this is the antithesis of the meaning of “motivation” in a detective story. The detective – Hercule Poirot, or Miss Marple, or Adam Dalgleish, or whoever – asks who would profit from this murder, the underlying idea being that the murder has been carefully planned (it has indeed, so that the reader can have the enjoyment of puzzling out who did it and how it was done) and carried out with only one small slip. Real-life murders are seldom like that, and neither is real-life motivation. If you suppose that the things people do are the carefully considered actions of rational men and women, then there is a long catalog of stupid actions which defy explanation. Norman (1999) lists a succession of men (and one or two women) in recent public life who have made fools of themselves with indiscretions of various kinds, mostly of a sexual nature. The prince, of course, is the President of the United States of America playing with Monica Lewinsky in a windowless corridor off the Oval Office. How could they be so silly?

If you continue to think of motivation in detective-story terms, there is no getting beyond that question: How could they be so silly? To understand actions such as Bill Clinton’s seduction of, it seems, a series of women, that internalized, reason-for-action, calculated-outcome, rational notion of motivation has to be abandoned. Bill Clinton and the other public figures did what they did because they were “switched on.” Switch someone on and their actions follow almost like clockwork. What we have to study is the innate patterns of behavior stored inside individuals, the signals that switch them on and those other circumstances which modulate the expression of their innate patterns. That represents quite a different view of motivation. It does not accord with personal experience – and we must ask why it does not accord – but it is nevertheless the view that ultimately makes sense.

Chapters 1 to 15 are based rather closely on a series of lectures that I have given to third-year undergraduates here in Cambridge for the past six years. Giving those lectures has meant working out what ideas about motivation especially need to be put across and how best to do it. I have endeavored to transpose those explanations into text. My lectures are also illustrated with video examples of the kinds of thing people actually do, but unfortunately those examples cannot be reproduced here.

Nevertheless, I emphasize that this is the subject above all others in which the student should observe what people around him or her do, and video is much the best way to accomplish that. At present there is a substantial volume of broadcasting on UK terrestrial television of some relevance to understanding human behavior. There is quite a bit of sex (of a serious, what-do-people-do-and-why? rather than a purely prurient kind), there are programs on drugs, and crime, and a surprising amount of “aggro” – *Neighbours at War* and *Workers at War* (BBC1), *Neighbours from Hell*, *Garages from Hell*, *Nannies from Hell*, *Parking Wars*, and *Police, Camera, Action!* (ITV) – to say nothing of other documentaries on more diverse topics. I emphasize that this material is broadcast as entertainment; it entertains by informing, but it is still entertainment. Moreover, in most cases a television journalist can

do no more than interview the participants after the event. Nevertheless, when two well-heeled neighbors spend tens of thousands of pounds each at law contesting the ownership of a three-inch strip of land (Gibb, 1999), what is going on? That is the kind of episode to make one think. The springs of human behavior are not what we suppose them to be.

It should cause no surprise if, *viewed as material for the social psychologist*, I say that these programs generally are of a low grade only. I repeat that they are made for entertainment, not for academic study. Only a tiny fraction of the material I record off-air makes it into my lectures as illustration. But what also needs to be emphasized is that seeing people doing their “thing” without thought of being recorded and later mulled over by a social psychologist is, in spite of the defects and the difficulties of capturing valid material in the first place, immensely more informative than merely reading about it in a book or newspaper. Again, on-the-spot home video footage of young men squaring up to fight (Woodford, 1998) is very much an exception, but it should not be missed. It does not have the quality of wildlife filming (it is only home video, filmed through a window), but it does have the objectivity, and it reminds me of nothing so much as two tigers fighting over vacant territory (Birkhead, 1997). I find that comparison a source of inspiration.

I emphasize that this book does not present a complete survey of human motivation. There is, for example, nothing about hunger or thirst. At the physiological level of investigation hunger and thirst have been much explored. It has happened so because these have been the principal manipulations to make rats run mazes and press levers in Skinner boxes. Current knowledge about the substrates of hunger and thirst are well covered in texts on physiological psychology (e.g., Rolls, 1999) and nothing is achieved by reiterating that material, less authoritatively, here. But in human society the meals that we take, when we eat, where, and what we eat, are very much a matter of convention, different in different cultures. So the physiological substrate is far from being the total of human hunger and thirst; though, frankly, I have little to add to it. But in a society where people generally are as well nourished as we are in Britain today, the social psychology of eating and drinking does not have much to tell us about the nature of human motivation. I may be wrong here; there may be a treasure-trove of exciting information that I have yet to discover. But according to my present knowledge, hunger and thirst do not tell us much.

But one serious omission from this book is maternal care. A baby cries in the middle of the night. Mother wakes and gets up to feed her infant. It happens night after night, notwithstanding that the mother is tired and short of sleep. Why? If mothers did not routinely get up to feed their babies when they cried in the night, we should (probably) none of us be here. But what is the psychological mechanism that wakes the mother up and gets her out of bed? My intuition is that maternal care could tell us much about human instinct, and there is an enormous existing literature. My only excuse is that I just do not know that literature and must leave



this domain of motivated behavior to someone who knows much more about it than I.

Finally, I should like to say thank you to Colin Fraser, Anthony Marcel, and Trevor Robbins with whom I have enjoyed a number of especially illuminating discussions during the seven years in which my understanding of human motivation has been maturing. In addition, Trevor Robbins read the first draft of this book and I am grateful to him for his critical comments. I also thank my editors at Blackwell, Phyllis Wentworth and Sarah Coleman, for their patience in nudging me toward this final version of my text.

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# INTRODUCTION: THREE FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS

A, B, C,  
*tumble down dee.*  
*The cat's in the cupboard,*  
*and can't see me.*

*(Cited by Opie & Opie, 1997, from Halliwell, 1842)*

But *why* is the cat in the cupboard?

Archy and Bella are just 2 years old as I write this. They cannot actually say why the cat is in the cupboard, but, if ever my wife or I open a cupboard door, one of them or the other or both immediately jump in. If I try to lift them out, they retreat behind the hot water cylinder or the wine rack. To Archy and Bella “cupboard” includes any compartment big enough to take a cat but ordinarily closed to them – the toilet, the bathroom, the garage, and the spare bedroom, the opened drawer of a dressing table or an umbrella opened up indoors to dry, even the wheel arch of a car, perching on top of the tire! If they hear the bedroom door open and shut, they will queue outside and, when I come out, they are in, often without my noticing. In that way it happens from time to time that they get shut in a cupboard for hours on end. Nevertheless, they seem not to learn. They do not want to stay in the cupboard – they will come out of their own accord after perhaps 10 minutes – but their fascination with entry into a cupboard continues unabated. With Archy and Bella it appears to be a near-mechanical response.

That some biological responses are mechanical is shown especially well by the begging response of herring gull chicks described by Tinbergen (1951): “Newly hatched chicks of the herring gull beg for food by pecking at the tip of the parent’s bill. The latter regurgitates the food on to the ground, picks up a small morsel and, keeping it between the tips of the beak, presents it to the young. After some incorrect aiming the young gets hold of the food and swallows it” (p. 29). The bill of the herring gull is yellow, with a red spot at the end of the lower mandible; that stimulus can be easily simulated with a cardboard model in the laboratory.

Experiment shows the red spot to be critical. Spots of other colors will also produce a begging response, but less freely, while a plain yellow bill is the worst of all. In fact, the color of the bill makes no difference at all, nor does the color of the head.

This begging response is clearly instrumental in the nurture of the young, and it is easy to imagine that evolution has shaped it and the color of the parent's bill to match perfectly. But the truth of the matter is actually simpler than that. In the laboratory it was found that a red pencil-shaped model with three white roundels near the tip proved even more effective than an accurate three-dimensional model of the parent's head (Tinbergen & Perdeck, 1951). The begging response is simply a mechanical reaction (Tinbergen's term is *innate releasing mechanism*) to a specific stimulus (a *sign stimulus*) and the red spot on the parent's lower mandible merely triggers that reaction sufficiently well to ensure that the young get fed. There is no biological adaptation; there is no necessity even for an innate releasing mechanism to be biologically useful (though this one clearly is). It is just that if the begging response were not triggered by the parent's bill, or did not exist at all, neither would the herring gull.

## WHAT IS "MOTIVATION"?

For this book, motivation means the switching on of some pattern of behavior, of a program of action specified within the individual. That program might be innate or it might have been modified by experience. But each biological species has to have a repertoire of instinctive, "hardwired," patterns of behavior; humankind is no exception. If we, and all other animal species, were not equipped with such patterns of behavior, we should none of us be here. Given an appropriate stimulus, the corresponding pattern is triggered. Although the word "motive" suggests a source of energy, the trigger stimulus is not itself that source; rather, it releases an internal source of energy, somewhat like switching on a television set. We are therefore set to look for instinctive patterns – I shall use the phrase "quasi-mechanical" – in human behavior.

Eating food when hungry is instinctive. Laboratory training can tack another sequence of behavior – traversing a maze or pressing a lever – on to the front end of that instinctive pattern, a procedure known as "conditioning." When the augmented pattern which results has been well learned, it is executed pretty much as one single pattern, as though it were all instinctive. When a rat has thoroughly learned its way through a maze, its performance on repeated trials is fast and accurate. Carr and Watson (1908) examined the effects of shortening or lengthening certain of the alleys in such a well-learned maze. When an alley was shortened, rats tended to run into the end wall instead of turning as required. When an alley was lengthened, rats tended to turn (into what was now a blind) at the place where they

had formerly been accustomed to turn and then to continue at full speed to the end of the cul-de-sac.

Placing a rat in a familiar Skinner box provides the stimulus that triggers the augmented behavior pattern. Once that augmented pattern is reliably acquired, a further sequence can be tacked on to its front end, and animals can, in some cases, be trained to execute remarkably elaborate sequences of behavior (Skinner, 1951). But if the stimulus that triggers that elaborate pattern approximates a stimulus that triggers some other instinctive pattern, the sequence breaks down or, at the least, becomes unstable. Breland and Breland (1961, p. 683) found that though their pig had been properly trained to put a (wooden) penny in a piggy bank, he would, after a matter of weeks, “repeatedly drop it, root it, drop it again, root it along the way, pick it up, toss it up in the air, drop it, root it some more, and so on.” Any stimulus which engages some instinctive (or augmented) behavior pattern will cause the animal to do something. The wrong social stimulus at the wrong time and place can throw a child into a tantrum or cause an adult to turn to violence.

## **HOW CAN WE STUDY HUMAN MOTIVATION?**

On February 12, 1993, James Bulger, aged 2, was led away by two 10-year-olds from the Strand shopping precinct in Bootle, Merseyside, and brutally murdered. Everyone asks: “Why did they do it?”

When an experimental scientist is faced with an empirical question, he or she devises an experiment to provide the answer. But there is not going to be any experiment in which a child of 2 gets killed, or even runs a risk of being killed, or gets hurt in any way, or is even scared or subject to any other kind of trauma. And there is not going to be an experiment in which 10-year-olds are invited to do any of these things, even in simulation. Experimental manipulations in which motivational states are induced, even in volunteer participants, are potentially unethical. To put the matter succinctly, no experimenter (in our society) is going to be allowed to wind anyone up over something which actually matters. So how then can we study human motivation?

### **The Use of Anecdotal Material**

We must use whatever material evidence comes to hand – experiment where experiment is feasible (but frequently experiment is not feasible), survey evidence (but often it is not possible to record a sufficient number of like cases), and elsewhere anecdote. Anecdotal material does not have the reliability of controlled experimental observation, nor even the lesser reliability of survey data. So, does it tell us anything of value? And let not the fact that “human interest” stories make

attractive reading delude us into thinking that they therefore convey a balanced picture. Anecdotal material fulfills three functions.

### *1 Illustration of experimental findings*

Particular well-chosen episodes are cited as illustrations of the kind of behavior to which experimental findings relate. This may sound needless to the professional who is *au fait* with the history and direction of the investigation. But leave that illustration out, and the reader has to supply a substitute from his or her own experience and that substitute may be lacking. So, one very important function of anecdote, which I believe psychologists use too infrequently, is to illustrate what the experimental findings mean for ordinary everyday behavior. Psychopathologists have long used case histories to illustrate their discourse and social psychologists need something similar. In fact, mere verbal description of what someone did is often inadequate – the reader needs to see them doing it and, in these days, that is feasible with video recordings.

### *2 Confirmation of the validity of experimental findings*

Surprising though it may seem, anecdote is also needed to check on the applicability of experimental results. Laboratory experiments on aggression are a particular case in point. The laboratory procedure (e.g., Lang, Goeckner, Adesso, & Marlatt, 1975; see p. 216) is contrived. Two strangers meet in a laboratory and carry out some task together. One of them (a confederate of the experimenter) is abusive to the other. The other (the real participant) subsequently gets a chance to administer “electric shocks” to the confederate. What level of shock, or how many shocks, will he administer? The results of such an exercise are, of course, valid for that particular laboratory milieu, but what do they tell us about spontaneous violence in the real world outside? Do they extrapolate to violence on the football terraces?

The participant in a laboratory experiment enters into a social relationship with the experimenter, a factor which proves material in understanding the results from Milgram’s (1974) experiments in chapter 6. If the experiment provides knowledge of results at the end of every trial, that social relationship hardly affects the outcome, but when the experiment involves a choice of response for which there is no “right” or “wrong,” implicit indication from the experimenter of what kind of response would appear plausible can have material effects on the data. Magnitude estimation (Stevens, 1956) is a case in point. The experimenter nearly always illustrates his instructions with numerical examples and the values of the numbers in those examples are taken by the participants as an indication of how widely they should spread their numbers. Preplanned manipulation of the numbers in the illustrative examples has fed through into the spread of the numerical estimates (see Laming, 1997).

In experiments with confederates and electric shock there are two additional hazards. Some of the participants might suspect (1) that the confederate is a confederate, not a real partner, and react differently in consequence, and (2) that the confederate does not really get shocked anyway. So experiments on aggression, especially, need to be validated by comparisons with real aggressive behavior from the world outside, and that means anecdote. Berkowitz (1993, chap. 13) addresses this question and is able to confirm that the results of laboratory experiments hold up when extrapolated to the real world outside the laboratory; but – that question very much needed to be answered.

### *3 Identification of questions for further study*

There are some areas of human social behavior which are not amenable to specifically experimental manipulation; for example, the influence of the media on violent crime and suicide or the evolution of social conventions. Some of these topics can be studied by sociological survey (e.g., Phillips, 1983), but there are others which, seemingly, cannot – extrusion from society; allocation of very large rewards in any context; the effects of bringing up a child in isolation from human society. In addition, the experiments which Asch and Milgram performed would probably not be permitted according to the ethical standards prevailing today. In these cases, anecdote is all that we have left. The question therefore arises: What use can we make of anecdote? Does it have any usable reliability?

The design of an experiment or a survey first requires the formulation of a question to put. While the correlations in survey data can often be reanalyzed from a different point of view, experimental data usually cannot because control observations, essential from that different point of view, are commonly lacking. So an important preliminary concerns the choice of hypothesis around which to design the experiment. *The function of anecdote in the absence of experimental or survey data is to identify useful questions to put.* If there is no opportunity to answer those questions – the experiments cannot be carried out, or insufficient cases are available for statistical analysis – that is as far as the inquiry can proceed. There is no reason why the inquiry should not proceed that far, but the conclusions are necessarily tentative and their fallible basis must always be borne in mind.

To sum up, anecdote provides an invaluable source of ideas and hypotheses in areas of human behavior where experiment is lacking. Anecdote does not supersede experiment – quite the contrary. Its most important function is to provide the inspiration for experimental investigation, where such investigation is feasible. But anecdote can also inform us about the extremes of human motivation, especially terror and rage. By looking at those extremes we can see the most clearly what motivation is and how it works. Moreover, those extremes are where experiment is most frequently infeasible.

## THREE FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS

It is in the nature of scientists to propose theories and to use those theories both to guide further research and to systematize the material to be taught. But in the field of human motivation I, personally, think that “theory” is premature. In our present state of understanding, “theory” amounts to no more than “perspective.” But perspectives are important. They assist the student to assimilate the material and to relate different observations to each other. This book is written around three particular perspectives that complement each other. The examples I have already cited introduce the first.

### Quasi-Mechanical Behavior

Some part of human (and animal) behavior consists of instinctive patterns of response. Some larger part consists of instinctive patterns which have been augmented by acquired sequences of behavior; these might be due to specific learning or to cultural constraints. These augmented behavior patterns are initiated sometimes by quite specific stimuli – the sight of one’s girl- or boyfriend.

Archy and Bella will jump into any small compartment, and some not so small. The responses of my pet cats look quasi-mechanical, triggered by quite specific circumstances. Is there any reason why similarly mechanical responses should not be incorporated in human behavior? If that possibility sounds implausible, out of the question, that is only because we are accustomed to look at human behavior, especially our own behavior, from the inside out, as it were. Our own behavior does not *feel* mechanical at all, and that lack of a mechanical feel to it calls forth a second idea.

### Personal View and Camera View

On May 26, 1999, Manchester United played Bayern Munich at Nou Camp, Barcelona, in the final of the European Cup. The football match was watched by about 500 million people worldwide (Dickinson, 1999) who all saw exactly the same video transmission. That is exactly a *camera view*, perceptible by anybody and everybody, except for those who were there at the match. One such was David Beckham. Two minutes into injury time at the end of the second half he took a corner kick on the left. This was Manchester United’s last-gasp opportunity to win the match outright before going into “extra time.” What was in Beckham’s mind as he took that kick? Whatever it was, it constitutes a *personal view*, private to the individual. No one else can experience what David Beckham felt as he took that kick.



Now the viewer, any of the 500 million, would have seen that corner kick as fairly predictable. David Beckham is highly skilled and very well practiced at corner kicks. He routinely took them for his side throughout the game. The only uncertainty for the viewer was exactly where the kick would go. But for Beckham the kick was anything but mechanical. He had to choose where to put the ball – on whose head he should try to place it. The kick does not seem at all mechanical to the footballer because he is at one and the same time both the highly skilled and complicated biological machine kicking the ball and also the observer of that action – a machine observing itself.

Here is the crucial point: A machine cannot see itself as mechanical. Look at the clock sitting on your mantelpiece. (I envisage a clock of traditional construction driven by a mainspring.) You use it to tell the time. Now imagine yourself to be the clock, looking out into the room. What would you see from your perch on the mantelpiece? The clock itself cannot tell the time because, like you and me, it cannot see its own face (except with a mirror and then the face would be left-to-right). Nor would the clock know anything about clockwork, just as you, unless you happen to be a doctor, do not understand the internal workings of your own body. And even doctors have to speculate about what happens in the brain. But you *do* know what it is like to be “wound up,” and so also does your clock. I would guess, without inquiring, that David Beckham felt immense internal tension at that crucial moment in the game.

### **Social Extrusion**

We shall also need a third idea. When we compare social behavior in one culture with that in another it quickly becomes apparent that much of what people do, socially, is constrained by the society in which they live. To take one simple, but very common, example. Although it is practicable in these days of the welfare state for a mother to bring up children on her own, her task is much easier if she has the children’s father to help her. That cooperation comes at a “price,” because the management of the children, the way they are disciplined, the holidays the family takes, is now a joint decision of both parents, neither of whom has exclusive command. Marriage has been with us for as long as historians can trace the custom, and many husbands and wives find the arrangement satisfactory. But the nature of the marriage relationship is characteristically different in different societies. Compare, for example, marriage customs on the Indian subcontinent (see p. 115) with marriage between spouses of Anglo-Saxon descent in the UK; that difference is the result of social custom. Compare also “plural marriage” as practiced by some Mormons (Whitworth, 1999b). An additional idea is needed to answer the question of how different societies maintain these different institutions of marriage – how society exercises that kind of control over its members.

The analogy of the clock is again useful. The clock on the mantelpiece is there so that we can tell the time at a glance. There is, however, a “correct” time and if that is not what the clock shows, it must be put right. Once the clock has been put right, it must continue to tell the correct time, and if it runs slow or fast, it must be regulated. Ultimately, if regulation does not achieve sufficiently accurate running, the clock is thrown away and replaced by a more reliable timepiece. Individual members of society are subject to an analogous control. Our interaction with others around us seems to be instinctive. But if we, as individuals, do not respond sufficiently to the people around us, that interaction decreases and, if sufficiently deviant behavior be persisted in, ultimately ceases. Two practical examples are the incarceration of the criminal in prison and of the insane in a mental institution. But, for most of us, the resulting loneliness proves so intolerable that the patience of society is seldom pressed that far. Society maintains control over its individual members through the ultimate sanction of extrusion. That is the third idea we shall need.

These three ideas will help us to understand why people do what they do. What people do is to express innate patterns of behavior and culturally acquired patterns in ways that are constrained by the demands and conventions of the society in which they live. The same three ideas will also help in transposing what people say – why they did certain things, or the emotions they felt while doing them – into terms of what can be objectively observed.

### **Some Omissions**

There are some topics, however, that I have omitted, even though most people will naturally look for them in a book on human motivation. Foremost are eating and drinking, because the long tradition of research into how our intake of food and water is controlled is all at a physiological level and seldom makes contact with the reasons why ordinary people eat and drink when they do. While the physiological mechanisms controlling water intake are sensitive to internal deficit, we habitually drink before any deprivation arises at that level. The internal deficit needs to be severe to promote drinking. Blood donors lose about 10 percent of their blood volume, but do not usually report thirst (Wagner, 1999, chap. 4). How then is normal drinking controlled? It seems to me that these topics are more appropriately placed in a book on physiological psychology. Sleep and arousal are two other omissions, and I suggest Wagner (1999) as a readable physiologically based account to make up this deficit.

But I see the absence of any account of maternal care as a serious omission. A mother’s getting up in the middle of the night to feed her newborn baby is, surely, instinctive. But I do not know enough to write about it.

## THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

In the study of human motivation, we are still at the stage of searching for those questions that especially need to be asked. This book is therefore organized around a series of elementary propositions that may, or may not, hold true. Each chapter argues one such proposition. The plan of the whole is most succinctly set out by listing these propositions.

- Chapter 1* There are two quite distinct views of what people do; there is (1) the (subjective) personal view we each have of our own behavior and (2) the (objective) camera view that everybody else has of us. In camera view behavior appears determinate, but in personal view it is characterized by free will.
- Chapter 2* Terror is the circumstance in which, even in personal view, people realize that their actions are no longer under their own control.
- Chapter 3* Sexual behavior is compulsive. In camera view it appears substantially mechanical; and the emotion we experience is the subjective counterpart (in personal view) of being motivated.
- Chapter 4* The relation between subjective experience (in personal view) and objective behavior (in camera view) is important to the interpretation of anecdote . . .
- Chapter 5* . . . and is used to put the question: Why is boredom so unpleasant? Is it because some basic motivation is being frustrated?
- Chapter 6* Much of our social life is governed by the expectations of people around us. Experiments by Stanley Milgram on obedience reveal some of the ground rules.
- Chapter 7* Expectations are sometimes different in different societies, and in different subgroups within the same society.
- Chapter 8* Deprivation of social contact with other people is intolerable. This is important because . . .
- Chapter 9* . . . the ultimate threat of extrusion provides society with the sanction by which social conventions are maintained.
- Chapter 10* Social conventions evolve through interactions between individual members of society. Experiments by Solomon Asch, ostensibly on the judgment of lengths of line, reveal some of the ground rules.
- Chapter 11* When a crowd is temporarily cut off from the influence of the larger society around it, those interactions can sometimes cause collective behavior to evolve rapidly.
- Chapter 12* Aggressive behavior is also instinctive, but is ordinarily held in check by social convention. Sometimes that constraint proves insufficient . . .

*Chapter 13* . . . but incitement by the media proves to be no more than slight.

*Chapter 14* Money is technically an incentive, but proves to be a great motivator. It quickly brings out the baser side of human nature . . .

*Chapter 15* . . . and drives people to gamble.

Finally, chapter 16 summarizes the entire argument and speculates how our understanding of human motivation might develop over the next 50 years.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 How would you (the reader) formulate a theory of motivation, and what do you think such a theory should look like?
- 2 What differences (if any) are there between the motivation of humans and of subhuman animals?

# DETERMINISM AND FREE WILL

Why should a book on human motivation be concerned with determinism and free will?

I have already described Archy and Bella's habit of entering every cupboard they can and, not infrequently, getting trapped inside. They have other near-mechanical habits as well. If I open a bottle of mineral water – sssss! – they quickly run off. When Bella stalks a pigeon, she crouches low, with her belly almost on the ground. No one taught her to do that – she left her mother at the age of 3 months – and she does it in the middle of an open lawn – she has not yet learned the advantages of cover or of dappled shade to a white and tabby cat. When she catches a bird, she brings it into the dining room to eat. The bird is promptly confiscated, so, when she next catches a bird, she brings it into the dining room to eat . . . It is not surprising that we usually think of animals as responding mechanically to stimuli and events around them and being thereby devoid of responsibility. But we do not speak about human behavior like that!

As a cultural matter, we have one way of speaking about animal behavior, why an animal does what it does – animal behavior is generally seen as determinate, though some people do anthropomorphize their pets – and quite another way of speaking about human behavior – people have free will. Why the difference? It is generally agreed that what people do and why they do it is controlled by events in the brain and central nervous system, and examination of the brains of humans and of most mammals shows them, in the first instance, to be morphologically alike. Is the organization and direction of human behavior, on the one hand, and of animal behavior, on the other, really so different?

This problem arises because we are, at one and the same time, scientists asking questions about what people do and also people about whom those questions might be asked. We can observe other people with complete objectivity and notice that they do things that we might easily be doing ourselves. At the same time, we experience our own actions from a distinctly subjective viewpoint. There are, therefore, two quite distinct viewpoints from which *our* behavior might be observed. There is

the viewpoint (*personal view*) from which we experience our own actions, and that other viewpoint (*camera view*) from which every one else observes us. We typically look at what animals do in camera view, but interpret other people's behavior from a personal-view standpoint.

If we decide, on careful examination, that people and animals are motivated in much the same way, then we have to choose between these two different viewpoints. Each of us has a lifetime's experience of feeling, thinking, planning, and doing, and we view all that in terms of intention. We assume that other people have a similar fund of experience and that what they do can be understood in the same way. This is characteristic of the personal viewpoint from which we experience our own actions and all our internal thoughts, feelings, and desires.

But we do not know what it is like to be a cat and therefore take an objective camera view of what cats do. Cats are seen as somehow mechanical, their behavior as determinate. But we can also look at our fellow men and women in camera view – though, curiously, not ourselves. There are, then, these two ways of looking at what people do. Which of these is the more appropriate to a scientific study of motivation? That question has to be resolved before we can even get started. The apparent antithesis between determinism and free will is truly “Question No. 1” for the study of human motivation.

It will help to have a peek at the solution in advance. What each of us does is, at one and the same time, *both* determinate and *also* characterized by free will. If we observe someone else's behavior in camera view, their behavior appears determinate; but our own behavior in personal view is characterized by free will. Someone else looking at what we are doing will see our actions as determinate, but see themselves as having free will. The difference between determinism and free will lies not in the behavior but *in the viewpoint from which that behavior is observed*. That is the central issue in this chapter.

## DETERMINISM

Philosophically, free will is “the power or capacity to choose amongst alternatives or to act . . . independently of natural, social or divine restraints” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1989b), while determinism is the “theory that all events, including moral choices, are completely determined by previously existing causes” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1989a). The philosophical idea of determinism is particularly associated with Laplace in the eighteenth century, but it has an ancient theological history as the doctrine of predestination. However, while it might appear that the theologians have been arguing some real difference of opinion, though one very difficult to resolve, the arguments to follow here will show that determinism and free will are not antitheses – they are simply the characteristics of two different ways of looking at what people do. So, in their theological incarnation, they are no more than shibboleths, serving only to distinguish between different religious societies.