

[08] Motivation

A. Introduction

The study of motivation is the study of *explanation*. Thinking and talking about motivation is asking the question, 'Why?'. One of the interesting things about how Type 1 thinking works is that it moves virtually seamlessly from observation and reflection (thinking about *what* has happened or not happened)—what we usually term 'description'—to making judgments of motivation (thinking about *why* something has or has not happened)—what we usually term 'explanation'.

Key Concepts

- Drive, Instinct
- Hierarchy of Needs
- 'Need' vs 'Desire' or 'Want'

Because it's our Type 1 thinking doing this work we typically don't notice what we've done and people often have a hard time differentiating the two processes. Indeed, learning how to do research (using the so-called scientific method, for instance, though that's not the only place we've learned to do such things) might be argued to be about marking such distinctions and learning to take them seriously.

Type1 thinking also cherishes singular, unifying explanations. It abhors complexity and hates unresolved questions—to the extent of embracing a bad or unpleasant explanation than none at all. But the study of real humans in real life suggests that, to the contrary, *nothing* is done for just one reason. One of Freud's enduring legacies is the observation that although when asked our Type 1 thinking generally does come up with a single answer to the question 'Why did you do that?', behind such answers lie many others, unrecognized, unrecognizable and often disavowed, even if it takes special methods to detect them. (Freud used 'free association' and such procedures to detect them; in the modern world we can use things like fMRI to study what brains are doing more or less in real time.)

B. Questions to Guide Your (Re)Search

[1] When we think about such things it's easy for us to perceive how little we really know about strangers or people we have never or just recently met. Nonetheless ideas pop into our heads with enormous regularity about why people did what they did when we learn things about them. What are the most common sorts of motivations such 'spontaneous' thoughts ascribe to others? What 'theme' or pattern is there to the motivational explanations we come up with?

[2] As with most psychological processes the business of ascribing motivations happens so routinely and so regularly that we seldom notice we're making such judgments. Take some time to observe people you know in daily life, people in the media, and other places and see how many such judgments are being made. What patterns or themes appear in them? Do some people do this more than others? Does that seem to be more a matter of differences in personality or does it connect more with different roles people have in our society?

[3] Some actions (or failures to act) seem more easily explained motivationally than others. What happens when people can't guess at a motivation? How do they talk about the person or persons who seem to not have a definable motivation for their behavior?