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*Bernard Weiner*

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## An Attributional Theory of Motivation and Emotion



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**Better to attempt to light one small candle  
than to curse the darkness**

*Confucius*

# Preface

For a long time I have had the gnawing desire to convey the broad motivational significance of the attributional conception that I have espoused and to present fully the argument that this framework has earned a rightful place alongside other leading theories of motivation. Furthermore, recent investigations have yielded insights into the attributional determinants of affect, thus providing the impetus to embark upon a detailed discussion of emotion and to elucidate the relation between emotion and motivation from an attributional perspective. The presentation of a unified theory of motivation and emotion is the goal of this book.

My more specific aims in the chapters to follow are to: 1) Outline the basic principles that I believe characterize an adequate theory of motivation; 2) Convey what I perceive to be the conceptual contributions of the perspective advocated by my colleagues and me; 3) Summarize the empirical relations, reach some definitive conclusions, and point out the more equivocal empirical associations based on hypotheses derived from our particular attribution theory; and 4) Clarify questions that have been raised about this conception and provide new material for still further scrutiny. In so doing, the building blocks (if any) laid down by the attributional conception will be readily identified and unknown juries of present and future peers can then better determine the value of this scientific product.

Engaging in this task requires a degree of both megalomania and courage—megalomania because one assumes that the work deserves the attention of others and has some belief that their judgments will be positive; courage because numerous errors of omission and commission often are more evident to an author than to readers or critics. The narcissistic aspect of this task will lead me to highlight the contributions of the attributional perspective; such a book is not the place to hide “light under a bushel.” The more intrepid feature of my goal hopefully will enable me to write candidly about the shortcomings of the attributional approach that I advocate.

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Los Angeles, July 1986

Bernard Weiner

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