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# Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior

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To Our Parents:

Janice M. and Charles H. Deci

Jean M. and C. James Ryan

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# Preface

Early in this century, most empirically oriented psychologists believed that all motivation was based in the physiology of a set of non-nervous-system tissue needs. The theories of that era reflected this belief and used it in an attempt to explain an increasing number of phenomena.

It was not until the 1950s that it became irrefutably clear that much of human motivation is based not in these drives, but rather in a set of innate *psychological* needs. Their physiological basis is less understood; and as concepts, these needs lend themselves more easily to psychological than to physiological theorizing. The convergence of evidence from a variety of scholarly efforts suggests that there are three such needs: self-determination, competence, and interpersonal relatedness.

This book is primarily about self-determination and competence (with particular emphasis on the former), and about the processes and structures that relate to these needs. The need for interpersonal relatedness, while no less important, remains to be explored, and the findings from those explorations will need to be integrated with the present theory to develop a broad, organismic theory of human motivation.

Thus far, we have articulated *self-determination theory*, which is offered as a working theory—a theory in the making. To stimulate the research that will allow it to evolve further, we have stated self-determination theory in the form of minitheories that relate to more circumscribed domains, and we have developed paradigms for testing predictions from the various minitheories.

In working toward a broad motivation theory, we hope to contribute to the accelerating movement toward a motivational analysis of human functioning. For the past several years, theorists have been increasingly turning to motivational variables as central explanatory concepts in order to explain phenomena that were not well handled by previous theories that focused exclusively on behavioral or cognitive variables.

Our goal is to develop a truly organismic theory within empirical psychology. By assuming human agency (i.e., an active organism), by exploring the needs, processes, and structures that relate to it, and by exploring both the possibilities for and the limitations to human agency, we are attempting to explicate the dialectic of the organism's acting on and being acted upon by the social and physical environments. Since metatheories can be judged in part by the coherence and empirical utility of the theories that are built upon their foundation, we have tried to develop a theoretical framework that would give credence to this philosophical perspective.

Finally, our overriding, sociopolitical interest is examining the possibilities and obstacles for human freedom. In our thinking, this pertains not only to social, political, and economic structures, but also to internal psychological structures that reflect and anchor the external ones. It is our hope that, by engaging in a serious investigation of motivational issues, we can make some small contribution toward the larger goal of human freedom.

Preparation of this book, along with some of the research described in it, was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (BNS 8018628) and by the Xerox Corporation, through the efforts of John W. Robinson. The Department of Psychology at the University of Rochester has also supported our efforts. We are deeply indebted to all three organizations for helping to make this project possible.

For the past few years, we have been working to create the Human Motivation Program at the University of Rochester. Through the juxtaposition of scholars interested in motivation from the divergent viewpoints of social, developmental, personality, and clinical psychology, we have been able to stimulate dialogue, to facilitate research and scholarship, and to provide doctoral training in motivation as it relates to those basic areas and to their applied ramifications. Much of the work presented in this book has been done in collaboration with other people affiliated with the Human Motivation Program. In particular, James P. Connell has worked closely with us in developing the theory of internalization that appears in Chapters 5 and 9. We are indebted to Jim as well as to other faculty members in the Department of Psychology with whom we have collaborated, and we are grateful to all of the graduate students who have contributed to the research effort. We would especially like to acknowledge the significant empirical contributions of Wendy Grolnick, Richard Koestner, and Robert Plant. In addition, we express our appreciation for the efforts of our colleagues at other universities who have contributed greatly toward an explication of the issues raised in this book. Robert J. Vallerand made comments on several chapters

of the book, and Elliot Aronson has been an important source of moral support. We thank both of them.

Betsy Whitehead did a heroic job of typing and editing the manuscript. Not only did she continually retype to keep up with our rewriting and with new word processing systems, but she continually spotted errors and inconsistencies in construction and content. We thank Betsy, and we also thank Cathy Ward and Shirley Tracey for their clerical assistance.

EDWARD L. DECI  
RICHARD M. RYAN



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