

## WHAT MAKES US TICK? INTEREST, PASSION AND REASON

JON ELSTER

The set of human motivations is a pie that can be sliced any number of ways. Although none of them can claim canonical status, there are three approaches that I have found illuminating. The first suggests a continuum of motivations, while the second and the third each offers a trichotomy of motivations. The three classifications are both roughly similar and interestingly different, allowing us to illuminate the same behaviors from different angles.

On September 11 2001, some people jumped to their death from the World Trade Center because of the overwhelming heat. 'This should not be really thought of as a choice', said Louis Garcia, New York City's chief fire marshal. 'If you put people at a window and introduce that kind of heat, there's a good chance most people would feel compelled to jump'. There was no real alternative. Subjectively, this may also be the experience of those who drink sea water when freshwater is unavailable. They may know that drinking even a little seawater starts you down a dangerous road: The more you drink, the thirstier you get. Yet the temptation may, for some, be irresistible. The craving for addictive substances may also be experienced in this way. An eighteenth century writer, Benjamin Rush, offered a dramatic illustration: 'When strongly urged, by one of his friends, to leave off drinking [an habitual drunkard] said, "Were a keg of rum in one corner of a room, and were a cannon constantly discharging balls between me and it, I could not refrain from passing before that cannon, in order to get at the rum"'. As the recent adventures of an American President show, sexual desire may also be so overwhelming as to crowd out more prudential concerns. Some emotions may also be so strong as to crowd out all other considerations. The feeling of shame, for instance, can be unbearably painful, as shown by the suicide of a Navy admiral who was about to be exposed as not entitled to some of the medals he was wearing, or by the six suicides in 1997 among Frenchmen who were exposed as consumers of pedophilic material.

Except perhaps for the urge to jump from the World Trade Center, it is doubtful whether any of these desires was literally irresistible, in the way a boulder rolling down a hillside might be irresistible to a person trying to stop it in its course. Addicts are somewhat sensible to costs: they consume less when prices go up.<sup>1</sup> People in lifeboats sometimes succeed in preventing each other from drinking seawater. Other high officials with the same urges and opportunities have been able to resist sexual temptation. The urge to kill oneself in shame is certainly resistible. Because of their intensity, these visceral cravings nevertheless stand at one extreme of the spectrum of human motivations. They have the potential, not always realized, for blocking deliberation, tradeoffs and even choice.

At the other extreme, we have the paradigm of rational choice. Rational agents are unperturbed by visceral factors, including emotion. They act only after carefully – but only as carefully as is desirable under the circumstances – weighing against one another the consequences of each available option. In doing so, they take account of their intrinsic value, their likelihood of occurrence and their distribution over time, and choose the one that appears best overall. The motivation of rational agents is *disembodied*, in the sense that their decision-making process might be faithfully represented by a computer program. The only affective element in the process is that of assigning values to outcomes.

Between the extremes of this visceral-rational continuum, we find behaviors that are partly motivated by visceral factors, yet are also somewhat sensitive to cost-benefit considerations. A man may seek revenge (a visceral desire), yet also bide his time until he can catch his enemy unawares (a prudential concern). If he challenges his enemy to a duel (as required by norms of honor), he may take fencing lessons in secret (a dishonorable but useful practice). If a person is made an offer that is both unfair and advantageous, in the sense that he would be better off taking it than not, he might accept it or reject it depending on the strength of his interest vs the strength of his resentment. In more complex cases, one visceral factor might counteract another. The desire for an extramarital sexual affair might be neutralized by guilt feelings. An urge to flee generated by fear may be offset or preempted by an urge to fight caused by anger.

In their analysis of human motivations, the 17th century French moralists made a fruitful distinction among interest, reason and passion. *Interest*

<sup>1</sup> That might also be, however, because their budget does not allow them to consume at the same level.

is the pursuit of personal advantage, be it money, fame, power, or salvation. Even action to help our children counts as the pursuit of interest, since our fate is so closely bound up with theirs. A parent sending his children to an expensive private school where they can get the best education, is not sacrificing his interest but pursuing it.

The *passions* may be taken to include emotions as well as other visceral urges, such as hunger, thirst, and sexual or addictive cravings. The ancient also included states of madness within the same general category because, like emotions, they are involuntary and unbidden.

*Reason* is a more complicated idea. The moralists mostly used it (as I shall use it here) about the desire to promote the public good rather than private ends. Occasionally, they also used it to refer to long-term (prudential) motivations as distinct from short-term (myopic) concerns. Both ideas may be summarized under the heading of *impartiality*. In designing public policy, one should treat individuals impartially rather than favoring some groups or individuals over others. Individuals, too, may act on this motivation. Parents may sacrifice their interest by sending their children to a public school, because they believe in equality of opportunity. At the same time, policy makers as well as private individuals ought to treat outcomes occurring at successive times in an impartial manner by giving each of them the same weight in current decision-making, rather than privileging outcomes in the near future. In fact, some moralists argued, individuals concerned with their long-term interest will also tend to promote the public good. At the Federal Convention in Philadelphia, for instance, George Mason argued that

We ought to attend to the rights of every class of people. He had often wondered at the indifference of the superior classes of society to this dictate of humanity & policy, considering that however affluent their circumstances, or elevated their situations, might be, the course of a few years, not only might but certainly would distribute their posteriority through the lowest classes of Society. Every selfish motive therefore, every family attachment, ought to recommend such a system of policy as would provide no less carefully for the rights and happiness of the lowest than of the highest orders of Citizens.

Either form of impartiality comes in degrees. Even other-regarding individuals usually do more to promote the welfare of their family members than to promote that of unrelated individuals.<sup>2</sup> Often, the strength of

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, they may adopt an impartial attitude by acknowledging the right of unrelated individuals to give priority to *their* family members.

concern for others varies inversely not only with genealogical distance, but with geographical remoteness. Similarly, even prudent individuals usually give somewhat more weight to the near future than to the more remote, a fact that can only partly be explained by their knowledge that they might not live to enjoy the distant future.

As an example of how behavior may be understood in terms of any of these three motivations, we may cite a 1783 letter from the New York Chancellor Robert Livingston to Alexander Hamilton in which he comments on the persecution of those who had sided with the British during the wars of independence:

I seriously lament with you, the violent spirit of persecution which prevails here and dread its consequences upon the wealth, commerce & future tranquillity of the state. I am the more hurt at it because it appears to me almost unmixed with *pure patriotic motives*. In some few it is a blind spirit of *revenge & resentment*, but in more it is the most *sordid interest*.

The phrases I have italicized correspond to reason, emotion and interest, respectively. The adjectives are telling: reason is pure, passion is blind, interest is sordid. I return to some implications of these assessments.

Some motivations may be refractory to this trichotomy. Today, historians believe that the eight French wars of religion in the 16th century originated in the refusal of the Protestants to accept the doctrine of the transsubstantiation rather than, as has traditionally been argued, in their reaction to the widespread abuses in the Church. Because they believed in the absolute transcendence of God, they claimed that the idea of Jesus Christ as 'really present' in the bread and the wine in the Eucharist was a form of idolatry. A logical extension was to the idea that images and statutes representing religious figures were also 'idols' that had to be destroyed. The Catholics reacted with extreme violence to what they perceived as an intolerable insult to God and his saints. It took forty years of civil war for the ensuing passions to calm down enough for a durable peace to be possible. Yet although passions (as well as interest) have an important role in explaining the dynamics of the wars, the origins of the conflict are more difficult to grasp. Explanations in terms of 'religious fervor' or 'religious anxiety' are often opaque.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For instance, it is not clear why anxiety that one was *not doing enough* to ensure one's salvation should be more intense than the anxiety generated by the belief that there was *nothing one could do* to ensure salvation. Yet Calvinist believers in predestination apparently felt that the latter belief provided a greater peace of mind.

In his analyses of human motivations, Freud also suggested three basic forms, each of them linked to a separate subsystem of the mind. The three systems are the id, the ego, and the superego, corresponding respectively to the Pleasure Principle, the Reality Principle, and Conscience. The id and the superego represent respectively impulses and impulse control, while the ego, 'helpless in both directions [...] defends itself vainly, alike against the instigations of the murderous id and against the reproaches of the punishing conscience'. In a more illuminating statement from the same essay ('The Ego and the Id'), Freud wrote that the ego is 'a poor creature owing service to three masters and consequently menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the superego'. Yet even this formulation does not capture fully what I think is the useful core of Freud's idea. This is the proposition that as the ego is navigating the external world (the Reality Principle) it also has to fight a two-front war against the impulses coming from the id (Pleasure Principle) and the punitively severe impulse control exercised by the superego (Conscience).<sup>4</sup>

This proposition was original, profound and true. What it lacks, is a mechanism. Why could not the ego itself exercise whatever impulse control might be needed? Why do morality and conscience so often take the form of rigid rules? Do we need to stipulate the existence of separate and quasi-autonomous mental functions? It took the pioneering work of George Ainslie to provide satisfactory answers to these questions. His point of departure is that many impulses need to be kept in bay because of the *cumulative* damage they can do if unchecked.<sup>5</sup> On any given occasion, drinking or eating to excess, splurging or procrastinating (such as a failure to do one's homework) need not do much harm to the agent. The damage occurs after repeated excesses (or repeated failures). The focus of impulse control, therefore, must not be the individual occasion, since the person can always say to himself or herself that a new and better life will begin tomorrow. Impulse control must address the fact that the impulse will predictably arise on an indefinite number of occasions. The solution arises from reframing the problem, so that failure to control an impulse on any

<sup>4</sup> To combine two of Freud's metaphors, the ego is like a rider on an unruly horse (the id) while also being ridden by an incubus (the superego).

<sup>5</sup> There is also a fact of cumulative *risk*. The chance of unwanted consequences from unprotected sex may be small on any given occasion, but the lifetime risk might be considerable. On any given occasion, the chance of being injured in a car accident while not wearing a seatbelt is small, but the life-time probability is about one in three.

one occasion is seen as a predictor of failure to control it on all later occasions. 'Yes, I can postpone impulse control until tomorrow without incurring important harm or risk, but why should tomorrow be different from today? If I fail now, I shall fail tomorrow as well'. By setting up an *internal domino effect* and thus raising the stakes, the agent can acquire a motivation to control his impulses that would be lacking if he just took one day at a time. The other side of the coin is that the control must be relentless and, as the Victorian moralists put it, 'never suffer a single exception'.

These three approaches to motivation capture some of the same phenomena. Visceral factors, passions and the Pleasure Principle clearly have much in common. The last applies to a wider range of cases, because it involves pain avoidance as well as pleasure seeking. When students procrastinate in doing their home work, it is not necessarily because there is something else they very much want to do. Often, they are merely taking the path of least resistance. The superego and reason also have some features in common. Although not all systems of morality are rigid and relentless, some are. Kant's moral theory is a notorious instance. In fact, his moral philosophy may have originated in the private rules he made for himself to control his impulses, such as his maxim of never smoking more than one pipe after breakfast.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, morality can rise above rigidity, in individuals not subject to ambiguity aversion. The toleration of ambiguity is, in fact, often said to be the hallmark of a healthy ego. By contrast, the relation among rationality, interest, and the ego is more tenuous. It would be absurd to claim that the hallmark of a healthy ego is the rational pursuit of self-interest.

We often think of motivations as taking the form of wanting to do something. They may also, however, take the form of wishing something to be the case.<sup>7</sup> This distinction between wants and wishes is important if we look

<sup>6</sup> The rule was not unambiguous enough, however, to give him full protection, since as time passed he bought himself bigger and bigger pipes. Similarly, people who make a rule of not drinking before dinner may find themselves having dinner at ever earlier hours. The only rule that is invulnerable to such manipulation is 'Never do it'.

<sup>7</sup> If I wish something to be the case, there are three reasons why I may not want to bring it about. It may be unfeasible, as when I wish I were Napoleon. It may be feasible but outside my control, as when I wish that my love were requited. It may be within my control but I do not want to exercise it, as when I wish for my rival to lose his possessions yet do not want to be the person whose agency brings about that outcome. I am not saying that wishes cannot have any causal effects. When conjoined with other mental states, notably beliefs, they may induce cognitive dissonance and subsequent dissonance-reducing adjustments.

at the motivational component of emotion. Emotions can, in fact, be accompanied either by a want to do something or by a wish that something be the case. In anger or wrath, A's urge to take revenge on B cannot be satisfied by C doing to B what A had planned to do or by B suffering an accident. What matters is not simply the outcome, that B suffer, but that he suffer by A's agency. In sadism, too, what matters is to make the other suffer, not merely that he suffer. By contrast, in hatred what matters is that the hated person or group disappear from the face of the earth, whether this happens by my agency or by someone else's. In malice, too, what matters is that the other suffer, not that I make him suffer. In fact, a malicious person may recoil before actively taking steps to make the other suffer, not merely because he is afraid of being seen to do so but because it would be incompatible with his self-image. This is even clearer in envy. Many people who would enjoy seeing a rival losing his possessions and would do nothing to prevent it from happening if they could, would never take active steps to destroy them, even if it could be done without costs or risks to themselves.<sup>8</sup> A person who would not set his neighbor's house on fire might abstain from calling the fire brigade if he saw it burning.

A motivation to *get something* also differs from the motivation to *do something to get it*. In standard choice theory, people care directly about outcomes and only indirectly about actions. Preferences over outcomes induce preferences over actions: I prefer doing A rather than B if and only if doing A will get me X and I prefer X to Y, which is what I will get if I do B. If I got X without doing anything to get it, I would be just as well off as if I got X by doing A. In fact, since actions usually involve some cost or at least expenditure of effort, I'd probably be better off. This way of looking at the relation between behavior and outcomes is clearly right in many cases. If I suddenly discover a turkey in my freezer, I won't miss the trip I'd planned to the supermarket to buy one. Yet sometimes the value of getting something is conditioned upon agency. Addicts know that a drug will produce a more intense high when it is self-administered than when it is injected by someone else.<sup>9</sup> As suggested by the proverb 'Easy come, easy go' – and

<sup>8</sup> Some envious people, to be sure, have no such qualms. They may live in a society where little shame attaches to envy or they may just be shameless.

<sup>9</sup> Their reports are confirmed by experiments on rats in which level of brain reward can be measured directly. These findings show that the volitional centers and the pleasure centers of the brain are connected.

by the behavior of gamblers – windfall gains do not have the same weight as earned income.<sup>10</sup>

In some cases doing I can get X by doing A, but only if I do A in order to get Y. If I work hard to explain the neurophysiological basis of emotion and succeed, I may earn a high reputation. If I throw myself into work for a political cause, I may discover at the end of the process that I have also acquired ‘a character’. If play the piano well, I may impress others. These indirect benefits are parasitic on the main goal of the activity. If my motivation as a scholar is to earn a reputation, I’m less likely to earn one. To enter a political movement *solely* for the sake of the consciousness-raising or character-building effects on oneself is doomed to fail, or will succeed only by accident. If I think about the impression I’m making on others while I’m playing, I’ll play less well and fail to impress them. Self-consciousness interferes with the performance.

These cases fall in the category of *states that are essentially by-products* – states that cannot be realized by actions motivated only by the desire to realize them. These are states that may *come about*, but not be *brought about* intentionally by a simple decision. These self-defeating motivations include the desire to forget, the desire to believe, the desire to desire (e.g. the desire to overcome sexual impotence), the desire to sleep, the desire to laugh (one cannot tickle oneself), and the desire to overcome stuttering. Attempts to realize these desires are likely to be ineffectual and can even make things worse. It’s a commonplace among moralists that intentional hedonism is self-defeating, and that nothing engraves an experience so deeply in memory as the attempt to forget it. Although we may wish for these states to be realized, we should beware of wanting to realize them.

Many people care about *salvation* (in the afterlife) and *redemption* (for wrongs they have done). They may also believe they can achieve these goals by action. To die the death of a martyr in the fight against the infidels may provide the passport to heaven, or so some believe. To fight against the Nazis after having collaborated with them at an earlier stage may redeem the wrongdoing. Yet if these actions are undertaken for the *purpose* of achieving salvation or redemption, they may fail. In Catholic theology, the intention to buy a place in heaven by voluntary martyrdom would be an

<sup>10</sup> Leibniz said (correctly) that it would be absurd to assert that a man was richer the longer he had worked to build up his fortune. Yet it may be true that the longer he has worked to build it up, the longer he will retain it.

instance of the sin of simony. Some Islamic scholars make a similar criticism of suicide attackers who are motivated by the belief that they will get a privileged place in paradise. On moral grounds, the French press magnate who had collaborated with the German forces during the occupation of France and tried to redeem himself by writing a large check to the resistance when it became clear that the Germans were losing the war, should not have been granted, as he was, a nonsuit after Liberation.<sup>11</sup>

We can distinguish between *intrinsic* and *instrumental* motivations for action. Often, people read books or watch movies because they enjoy it, not because these activities are a means to some other end. Parents might, however, try to motivate children to read by offering them a reward if they come up with correct answers to five questions about a book they have been given. They would hope, presumably, that the children would 'get hooked' on reading and that their motivation would change from an instrumental to an intrinsic one, so that when the reward is taken away the children will keep reading at the same higher level. There is some evidence, however, that the opposite effect might be produced. A child might by himself or herself read 5 hours a week, then read 10 hours when rewarded for doing so, but fall back to 3 hours when the reward is removed. Although this phenomenon is indeed observed, its interpretation is controversial. The lower post-reward reading might be due to disappointment or to resentment rather than to an instrumental motivation crowding out an intrinsic one.

A related but different distinction is that between *consequentialist* and *non-consequentialist* motives for action. A policy maker might adopt the principle 'Finders keepers' (e.g. in patent legislation), on the assumption that if the person who discovers a new valuable resource is assigned the property right in it, more valuable resources will be discovered. This is a consequentialist argument. A non-consequentialist argument for the same policy might be that the person who discovers a new resource, whether it be a piece of land or a cure for cancer, has a natural *right* to property in it. For another contrast, consider two injunctions to act. The statement 'always wear black in strong sunshine' (as do people in Mediterranean countries to maintain circulation of air between the clothes and the body), appeals to a consequentialist motive. The statement 'always wear black at funerals' reflects a non-consequentialist social norm.

<sup>11</sup> The reason he went free was probably that the resistance needed the money and later found itself obliged to keep the implicit promise of immunity that acceptance of the check implied.

Why do people leave one country for another? Why do academics leave one university for another? Often, answers are classified as 'push versus pull'. One may emigrate either because the situation at home is unbearable or because the situation abroad is irresistibly enticing. At least this is a common way of viewing the matter. In many situations, however, it is misleading. Typically, people move because they *compare* the situation at home and abroad and find that the difference is big enough to justify a move, even taking account of the costs of the move itself.<sup>12</sup> Yet it can make sense to distinguish push-motives from pull-motives, when the former are closer to the visceral end of the continuum and the latter closer to the rational end. People in the grip of strong fear sometimes run away from danger rather than towards safety. The only thought in their mind is to get away, and they do not pause to think whether they might be going from the frying pan into the fire. Depending on the drug and on the circumstances, addicts can be motivated either by the pull from euphoria (cocaine) or by the push from dysphoria (heroin). Suicidal behavior, too, may owe more to push than to pull. It is escape from despair, not a flight to anything.

The operation of social norms can also be viewed in terms of push versus pull. The desire to excel in socially approved ways exercises a strong pull on many individuals, whether they strive for *glory* (being the best) or for *honor* (winning in a competition or combat). Other individuals are more concerned with avoiding the shame attached to the violation of social norms. In some societies, there is a general norm that says 'Don't stick your neck out'. To excel in anything is to deviate, which is the object of universal disapproval. 'who does he take himself for?' The relative strength of these two motivations varies across and within societies. Classical Athens illustrates the competitive striving for excellence.<sup>13</sup> In modern societies, small towns often show the stifling effects of the hostility to excellence. To risk a generalization, overall the push from shame is a more important motivation than the pull towards excellence, which is not to say that the latter cannot be powerful.

<sup>12</sup> This formulation presupposes that the costs of moving enters on a par with the benefits of having moved, as determinants of the overall utility of moving. Yet the costs of moving may also enter as *constraints* on the decisions. If the cheapest transatlantic fare costs more than the maximal amount a poor Italian peasant can save and borrow, he will remain in Italy no matter how much better he could do for himself in the US.

<sup>13</sup> Aeschylus, for instance, wrote his plays for performance at a dramatic competition. When he was defeated by the young Sophocles, he was so chagrined that he left Athens for Sicily.

The existence of *competing* motivations is commonplace:

In a divorce situation, I want custody of the children, but I also want the house and the car.

I need a book so strongly that I am tempted to steal it from the library, but I also want to behave morally.

In the face of a bully I am both afraid and angry: I want to run but also to hit him.

I want all children to have public education, but I also want my child to go a private school to obtain the best education.

I want a candidate who is pro-choice, but I also want one who favors lower taxes.

I want to smoke, but also to remain healthy.

If I am made an advantageous but unfair offer, 'take it or leave it', I want both to reject it because it's unfair and accept it because it's advantageous.

I want to donate to charity, but also to promote my own interest.

How is the conflict among these motivations resolved? A general answer might go as follows. Where the situation is one of 'winner take all', so that no compromise is possible, the strongest motivation wins. If my concern for my child is stronger than my concern for the schooling of children in general, I will send him or her to a private school. Since my pro-choice concern is stronger than my tax-cut concerns and no candidate favors both positions, I vote for a pro-life candidate who proposes to raise taxes. If somebody offers me 3 dollars out of a common pool of 10, intending to keep the rest for himself, I accept it. If I am offered only 2 dollars, I reject the offer if I can thereby prevent the other from getting anything. When compromise is possible, the stronger motivation has a stronger impact than the smaller one. A smoker may decide to cut down his cigarette consumption from 30 to 10 cigarettes a day. As a reflection of the strength of my altruism, I may decide to spend 5% of my income on charity.

This answer is not exactly wrong, but it is pretty simplistic, since the idea of 'strength of motivation' is more complicated than these quick examples suggest. A motivation may owe its strength to its sheer psychic force; this is the sense in which for instance visceral motives are often stronger than what Madison called 'the mild voice of reason'. A strong motivation

may also, however, be one that the agent endorses strongly. Each society or culture is characterized by a normative hierarchy of motivations. Other things being equal, a person would rather perform a given action for motive A than for motive B if A ranks higher in the hierarchy. These are *meta-motivations*, desires to be animated by desires of a certain kind.<sup>14</sup>

Interest and passion, notably, often show a certain *deference to reason*.<sup>15</sup> As Seneca said, 'Reason wishes the decision that it gives to be just; anger wishes to have the decision which it has given seem the just decision'. As there are very many plausible-sounding conceptions of reason, justice and fairness, it will indeed often be possible to present a decision taken in anger as conforming to reason. The trials of collaborators in countries that had been occupied by Germany during World War II were in many cases anchored in a deep desire for revenge. Yet because of their deference to reason, combined with their desire to demarcate themselves from the lawless practices of the occupying regimes, the new leaders presented the severe measures as justice-based rather than emotion-based. A person may have a first-order interest in not donating to charity and a second-order interest in not seeing himself as swayed by interest. In deference to reason, he may then adopt the philosophy of charity that can justify small donations: if others give much he will adopt a utilitarian policy that justifies small donations, and if others give little he will adopt a fairness-based policy that justifies the same behavior.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The idea of meta-motivations is unrelated to the concept of meta-preferences. An example of the latter would be a person with two *different* preference orderings, one for eating over dieting and one for dieting over eating, and a meta-preference favoring the latter. Following La Bruyère's insight that 'Men are very vain, and of all things hate to be thought so', a meta-motivation could amount to a preference for preferring dieting over eating on grounds of health over having *the same* preference ordering on grounds of vanity.

<sup>15</sup> Agents may also show a deference to *rationality*. We *want* to have reasons – desires and beliefs in light of which the action appears as rational – for what we do. In fact, our desire to act for a reason – our deference to rationality – can be so strong as to induce irrational behavior. When two options appear to be equally good, we may spend time and resources determining the one that is slightly better rather than simply flipping a coin. A dramatic illustration is how the use of the 'best interest of the child' principle in awarding child custody may work against the interest of the child, because of the emotional suffering induced by protracted litigation.

<sup>16</sup> I assume that these are unconscious adaptations, whose existence can be inferred only from their results. For a given individual, we would need evidence of consistent opportunism across *many* decisions to justify the inference. To infer self-serving adaptation from the fact that *one* impartial argument matches the interest of the agent would be to commit the functionalist fallacy of assuming that consequences of behavior that benefit an agent always serve to explain that behavior.

In these cases, reason has no independent causal role. It only induces an after-the-fact justification for actions already decided on other grounds. The conflict is not resolved, but swept under the carpet. In other cases, the adoption of a reason-based justification may change behavior. If I adopt a fairness-based policy of charity because others give little and they then begin donating much more generously than before, I have to follow suit. The same need for self-esteem that caused me to justify self-interested behavior by impartial considerations in the first place also prevents me from changing my conception of impartiality when it no longer works in my favor. We may imagine that in *King Lear* both Burgundy and France initially fell in love with Cordelia because of her prospects, but that only the former cared so little about his self-image that he was able to shed the emotion when it no longer coincided with his interest. This is a case of interest paying deference to passion rather than to reason, suggesting that passion, or rather this particular passion, ranks above interest in the normative hierarchy. Other passions, such as envy, might well rank below interest. We might then observe efforts to present envy-based action as interest-based or, rather, to undertake only such envy-based action as may be plausibly presented as interest-based.

Here's a more complex case. I wish that I didn't wish that I didn't want to eat cream cake. I want to eat cream cake because I like it. I wish that I didn't like it, because, as a moderately vain person, I think it is more important to remain slim. But I wish I were less vain. *But is that wish activated only when I want to eat cream cake?* In the conflict among my desire for cream cake, my desire to be slim and my desire not to be vain, the first and the last can form an alliance and gang up (or sneak up) on the second. If they catch me unawares they may succeed, but if I *understand* that the salience of my desire not to be vain is caused by the desire for cake I may be able to resist them.

Here is another complex case of motivational conflict. Let us assume that a person is tempted to steal a book from the library. If he feels guilty about doing it, he may abstain. If he steals the book and then feels guilt, he may return the book to the library. Suppose that the agent is initially unwilling to steal the book, but that as its value to him increases (for some reason) he finally decides to do so. Suppose conversely that the agent has stolen the book, but that as its value to others increases (for some reason) he finally returns it to the library. In the first case, its value to others is 10 and he decides to steal it just when its value to him reaches 15. In the second case, its initial value to him is 15 and the initial value to others is 6, but

he decides to return it only when its value to others reaches 15 (rather than 10). The reason for this asymmetry is found in the mechanism of dissonance reduction. A individual who is subject to several motivations that point in different directions will feel an unpleasant feeling of tension. When on balance he favors one action, he will try to reduce the tension by looking for cognitions that support it; when he favors another, he will look for cognitions which stack the balance of arguments in favor of that action. The strength of each motive is 'path-dependent' rather than fixed.