Part I

Introduction
The distinction between approach and avoidance motivation has a long and rich history in intellectual thought in general, and scientific psychology in particular. In accord with Lewin (1935), approach motivation may be defined as the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior toward, positive stimuli (objects, events, possibilities), whereas avoidance motivation may be defined as the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior away from, negative stimuli (objects, events, possibilities). Approach and avoidance concepts and constructs have been utilized across a diversity of scholarly disciplines, theoretical traditions, and empirical content areas.

Attention to the approach–avoidance motivational distinction has not been constant over the years, but may be seen as waxing and waning at different periods. At present, there appears to be substantial interest in approach and avoidance motivation, but it is also the case that motivationally relevant theories, models, variables, and hypotheses continue to be espoused with little or no consideration of this fundamental distinction. In addition, when the approach–avoidance distinction is utilized in the contemporary literature it is rarely explicitly defined, and approach and avoidance motivation are often described and discussed using diverse terminology that tends to obfuscate links between findings and frameworks.

Accordingly, the broad aims of the Handbook of Approach and Avoidance Motivation are threefold. First, the handbook is designed to illustrate the importance and broad utility of the approach–avoidance motivational distinction. Second, it is designed to provide a ready resource for scholars interested in theoretical and empirical work in this area. Third, it is designed to reveal conceptual and empirical links and convergences across disciplines, research traditions, and levels of analysis that will, it is hoped, facilitate cross talk and cross-fertilization among researchers and theorists.

In this introductory chapter, I begin by overviewing the history of the approach–avoidance distinction. I then proceed to explicate the fundamental role of approach and avoidance motivation in the functioning of organisms across the phylogenetic spectrum. Next, I return to the definition of approach and avoidance motivation offered above, and elaborate on several conceptual considerations inherent within this definition. I continue by discussing terminological issues pertaining to the approach–avoidance distinction, and then I close with a
brief overview of the various sections that comprise the contents of the handbook.

HISTORY

Distinguishing approach motivation from avoidance motivation may be considered one of the oldest ideas in the history of thought about the behavior of organisms. Scholars have made use of the approach–avoidance distinction for well over 2000 years. It first appeared in the writing of the ancient Greek philosophers Democritus of Abdera (460–370 B.C.E.). Democritus articulated an ethical hedonism in which the immediate pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain were prescribed as the guide for human action: “The best thing for man is to pass his life so as to have as much joy and as little trouble as may be” (fragment 189, see Copleston, 1946, p. 123; see also Aristippus [435–356 B.C.E.] and Epicurus [342–270 B.C.E.]). Plato (427–327 B.C.E.) had Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.) espouse various hedonic notions in Protagoras and Phaedo, although it is unclear whether such positions should be attributed to Socrates or Plato himself.

The eighteenth century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham was the first to clearly postulate a psychological hedonism, in addition to an ethical hedonism; this form of hedonism moved beyond a prescription of how we ought to behave to a proto-scientific description of how we actually do behave. This principle is directly stated at the beginning of Bentham’s Introduction to the Principles and Morals of Legislation: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do” (Bentham, 1779/1879, p. 1).

Within the field of scientific psychology per se, the approach–avoidance distinction was attended to from the beginning. Wundt (1887), for example, in his monumental Principles of Physiological Psychology (Vol. 3), conceptualized pleasure and pain as unique psychic elements brought into consciousness by sensation, emotion, and cognition (Marshall, 1889). In his classic Principles of Psychology (Vol. 2), James (1890) portrayed pleasure and pain as “springs of action,” noting that pleasure is a “tremendous reinforcer” of behavior and pain a “tremendous inhibitor” of behavior (pp. 549–559). James even provided speculation on the neural mechanisms underlying “impulsive” and “inhibitory tendencies” (p. 550). Freud (1915) construed the procurement of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (i.e., displeasure) as the basic motivational impetus underlying psychodynamic activity, and divided the superego into two parts—the ego ideal, representing what the person should do, and the conscience, representing what the person should not do (Freud, 1923). Thus, James and Freud moved beyond a general focus on pleasure and pain per se to a focus on the specific ways that approach and avoidance behavior are produced and regulated.

In addition to these early pioneers, many prominent psychological theorists over the years have made use of the approach–avoidance distinction in their work. Thorndike (1911), in his “law of effect,” described how responses followed by satisfaction are more likely to recur and responses followed by discomfort are less likely to recur. Jung (1921) posited that a fundamental difference between extroverts and introverts is that extroverts exhibit an interest in moving toward social objects, whereas introverts exhibit an interest in moving away from social objects. Tolman (1925) contended that a complete description of behavior must include reference to the end (i.e., goal) toward which or away from which the organism is moving. Pavlov (1927) identified two types of reflexive responses to stimuli, an orienting response toward the stimulus and a defensive response away from the stimulus. Lewin (1935) posited that goal objects in the life space have positive valences that attract and negative valences that repel. Horney (1937) discussed different strategies that individuals use to cope with their basic anxiety, including “moving toward” and “moving away.” Skinner (1938, 1953) distinguished between reinforcers that strengthen responses and punishing stimuli that weaken responses, and differentiated positive reinforcement (the provision of a positive) from negative reinforcement (the removal of a negative).

Murray (1938) distinguished between two types of psychological needs, “adient” (positive) needs that impel the organism toward other objects, and “abient” (negative) needs that impel the organism away from other objects. Hull (1943) proposed two classes of acquired drives, conditioned appetitive drives (e.g., involving food) and conditioned aversive drives (e.g., involving pain avoidance), and his mathematical theory of instrumental behavior included parameters representing the tendency to respond (reaction potential) and inhibit responding (inhibitory potential). Miller (1944) detailed various dynamic conflicts that can result from incompatible valences (e.g., being attracted to and repelled by the same goal object). Hebb (1949) posited that stimulation below a certain threshold leads to pleasure and approach behavior, whereas stimulation above the threshold leads to pain and avoidance behavior. Sullivan (1953) introduced the notion of self-personifications, including the good me and the bad me. Rotter (1954) proposed that individuals’
expectancies and values are largely a function of their experiences with prior rewards and punishments.

Maslow (1955) asserted that human beings have two basic sets of needs, deficit needs (e.g., safety) that involve striving to eliminate a negative-life situation and growth needs (i.e., self-actualization) that involve striving to attain a more positive-life situation. Cattell (1957) distinguished between the innate motives (ergs) of exploration (an appetitive motive) and escape to security (an aversive motive). Heider (1958) summarized the difference between “can” and “may” by stating that the former implies that if a person tries, he or she will succeed, whereas the latter implies that if a person tries he or she will not be punished. Mowrer (1960) differentiated between hoped for and feared states, and linked the presence and absence of these states to distinct emotions. Rogers (1961) stated that personal goals may either represent moving toward something positive or moving away from something negative. Erickson (1963) distinguished between basic trust and mistrust in articulating the crisis of the first psychosocial stage of development. Eysenck (1967) posited that introverts are “stimulus shy” due to high baseline levels of cortical arousal, whereas extraverts are “stimulus hungry” due to low baselines levels of cortical arousal. Bowlby (1969) proposed two distinct types of attachments, secure attachment that promotes challenge seeking and exploration, and insecure attachment that leads to caution and a preoccupation with safety and protection.

The aforementioned is but a sampling of the prominent psychological theorists who have implemented approach–avoidance concepts or constructs in their work. This listing emphatically documents the historical significance of the approach–avoidance distinction; it not only shows that the distinction has a long history, but also that it has a broad history. Indeed, the approach–avoidance distinction has been utilized in all of the major theoretical approaches that have been employed to scientifically explain behavior, regardless of how these approaches might be characterized: psychodynamic (e.g., Freud), behaviorist (e.g., Skinner), and humanistic (e.g., Maslow); dispositional (e.g., Murray) and situational (e.g., Thorndike); biological (e.g., Eysenck), affective (e.g., Mowrer), cognitive (e.g., Heider), and social cognitive (e.g., Rotter).

During the 1970s through the 1980s, many cognitive and social-cognitive theorists pitted cognitive against affective and motivational accounts of behavior. In this context, the approach–avoidance distinction was still utilized in theorizing to some degree, but in a much more limited way than in years past. It was with the acknowledgment in the 1990s that cognition, affect, and motivation are deeply intertwined, and need not be viewed as conceptual competitors, that motivational considerations in general, and the approach–avoidance distinction specifically, returned to prominence. This return to prominence is noteworthy, because use of the approach–avoidance distinction in the contemporary scene would appear to differ from prior use in two important ways. First, until recently, the approach–avoidance distinction had been widely utilized and applied without taking a step back to explicitly define and articulate the nature of approach and avoidance motivation. Thus, philosophers, theorists, and researchers over the years have incorporated the approach–avoidance distinction in many different ways in their work, but they have not clearly explicated the conceptual space represented by approach and avoidance motivation per se. Recent work has directly attended to this issue (Elliot, 1999, 2006; Elliot & Covington, 2001). Second, until recently, the approach–avoidance distinction has been used to address specific issues regarding motivation, without considering its broader potential as an explanatory tool. Prior work has focused on a diversity of specific issues—on hedonism as the ultimate energizer of activity; on the various appetitive and aversive mechanisms, needs, and motives that underlie observable action; on the different valence-based variables that serve to guide and direct behavior, etc. However, there has been little consideration of how the approach–avoidance distinction might be used to integrate various types and levels of analysis to construct a more detailed and sophisticated account of motivation. Recent work has moved in this direction (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Elliot & Church, 1997; Higgins, 1997; Lang, 1995).

FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF APPROACH AND AVOIDANCE MOTIVATION

The widespread use of the approach–avoidance distinction over the years undoubtedly reflects the fundamental role of approach and avoidance motivation in human functioning. Both approach and avoidance motivation are integral to successful adaptation; avoidance motivation facilitates surviving, while approach motivation facilitates thriving. This is the case with respect to physical and psychological adaptation alike (Elliot, 2006).

Approach and avoidance motivation not only plays a central role in the functioning of humans, but also in the functioning of organisms across the phylogenetic spectrum. Tooby and Cosmides (1990) have argued that the decision to approach or withdraw has been the
fundamental adaptive decision that organisms have had to make throughout their evolutionary past. To paraphrase Schneirla (1959), the high road of evolution has been littered with the remains of species that have failed to acquire one or more mechanisms for accurately determining the beneficial or harmful potential of environmental stimuli. As such, all animate life, from the single-cell amoeba upward, is equipped with at least some basic form of approach–avoidance mechanism that produces or regulates movement toward potentially beneficial stimuli and away from potentially harmful stimuli.

In the amoeba, approach and avoidance motivation is obviously extremely rudimentary, representing approach and withdrawal tendencies “energized directly by protoplasmic processes set off by the stimulus” (Schneirla, 1959, p. 2). For example, a weak light will stimulate a local flow of protoplasm toward the light, often followed by a general movement in that direction, whereas an intense light will stimulate a local contraction of protoplasm, often followed by a general movement away from the light source. Schneirla (1959) argued that organisms at all levels of complexity possess approach-based mechanisms that evoke appetitive reactions and facilitate food-getting, shelter-getting, and mating, and avoidance-based mechanisms that evoke withdrawal reactions and facilitate defense, huddling, flight, and protection, in general. He proposed that the sophistication of these mechanisms varies considerably across species, with those of protozoa and other invertebrates being rudimentary and rigid, and those of higher organisms being more advanced and flexible.

Researchers have not only documented the existence of approach and avoidance mechanisms across phyla, but have also shown individual differences in approach and avoidance motivation within a variety of different species. Intraspecific differences in the tendency to approach or avoid novel stimuli have been documented in monkeys (Suomi, 1983), cats (Adamec, 1991), dogs (Goddard & Beilharz, 1985), wolves (MacDonald, 1983), cows (Fordyce, Goddard, & Seifert, 1982), goats (Lyons, Price, & Moberg, 1988), rats (Garcia-Sevilla, 1984), mice (Kagan, 1998), birds (Verbeek, Drent, & Wiepkema, 1994), snakes (Herzog & Burghardt, 1988), fish (Wilson, Coleman, Clark, & Biederman, 1993), and even some crustaceans (Wilson, Clark, Coleman, & Dearnstye, 1994). Perhaps most provocatively, some researchers have conducted factor-analytic studies seeking to demonstrate the presence of basic dimensions of “personality” in nonhumans. For instance, Budaev (1997) used factor analysis to examine the patterns underlying exploratory, predatory inspection, and schooling behavior in male guppies. Results revealed two primary orthogonal factors that the investigator interpreted in terms of approach and avoidance motivation: an approach system “governing exploration and social attraction” and a fear avoidance system “governing responses to aversive stimulation” (p. 399). Comparable results suggesting independent, approach- and avoidance-based dimensions of “personality” have been obtained in factor-analytic studies of behavior with octopuses (Mather & Anderson, 1993), yellow-bellied marmots (Armitage, 1986), small-eared bushbabies (Watson & Ward, 1996), rhesus monkeys (Stevenson-Hinde, Stillwell-Barnes, & Zunz, 1980), and hooded rats (Maier, Vandenhoff, & Crowne, 1988).

It is not only just the organism’s ability to determine the adaptive significance of stimuli that is central to survival, but also the speed at which these determinations are made (Berntson, Boysen, & Cacioppo, 1993; Orians & Heerwagen, 1992). As such, all (surviving) organisms are hard-wired or “pre-programmed” to make immediate approach–avoidance responses to particular classes of stimuli (Zajonc, 1984, p. 122). Zajonc (1998) contends that “approach–avoidance discriminations” (p. 592) are the primary and most elemental reaction of organisms to environmental stimuli, the initial response on which all subsequent responses are based. This is nicely illustrated in the amoeba’s instantaneous, constitutionally ingrained approach or withdrawal response to light intensity, which is essentially a reflexive reaction to the light stimulus.

Humans, like protozoa, exhibit immediate, constitutionally ingrained approach and avoidance responses to certain classes of stimuli. For example, humans possess many different unconditioned exteroceptive reflexes that are commonly classified as orienting (e.g., the salivary reflex) or defensive (e.g., pain withdrawal and startle; Graham, 1973; Pavlov, 1927; Sokolov, 1963) and that may be considered manifestations of approach and avoidance motivation, respectively (Dickinson & Dearing, 1979; Konorski, 1967). One such reflex that has attracted significant research attention is the blink component of the startle reflex. This blink reflex is an involuntary response to an intense stimulus such as a loud noise, a bright light, or an electric shock, and occurs within 30–50 ms of stimulus onset (Bradley & Vrana, 1993). It serves the defensive function of protecting the eye from injury, and acts as a behavioral interrupt that clears processors to deal with potential threats in the environment (Lang, 1995; Öhman, 1997). The magnitude and latency of this primitive reflex has been shown to vary as a function of the motivationally relevant state of the individual prior to stimulus onset. That is, the blink reflex is stronger and its
Automatic evaluation is presumed to instantaneously evoke approach and withdrawal behavioral predispositions. Over the years, a number of theorists from the emotion (Arnold, 1960; Frijda, 1986; Lang, 1984; Lazarus, 1991), motivation (Corwin, 1921; Lewin, 1935; Mowrer, 1960; Young, 1959), and attitude (Bogardus, 1931; Doob, 1947; Osgood, 1953; Thurstone, 1931) literatures have posited that the positive or negative evaluation of a stimulus is inherently linked to a tendency to move toward or away from the stimulus, respectively. Empirical data support this proposition. In a set of reaction time experiments, Chen and Bargh (1999) had participants either pull a lever toward them (an approach-based flexor reaction) or push a lever away from them (an avoidance-based extensor reaction) as quickly as possible when a positively or negatively valenced stimulus word appeared. Results indicated that participants reacted more quickly for positive than negative words when they were instructed to pull the lever toward them (the approach response), and more quickly for negative than positive words when they were instructed to push the lever away from them (the avoidance response; Cacioppo, Priester, & Berntson, 1993; Förster, Higgins, & Idson, 1998; Solorz, 1960). These results were obtained even when no mention was made of the evaluative content of the stimuli and when participants were not instructed to evaluate the stimuli in any way, prompting Bargh and Chartrand (1999) to conclude that automatic evaluation results in a behavioral predisposition toward or away from the stimulus “in a matter of milliseconds” (p. 475).

It is important to highlight that the action disposition associated with automatic evaluation is a predisposition, not an overt behavioral response per se. Positively and negatively evaluated stimuli produce a physiological and somatic preparedness for approaching and withdrawing (Arnold, 1960), but observable behavior may or may not correspond to this initial behavioral readiness (Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1997). Actually, in lower organisms, and in constitutionally ingrained responses in humans, evaluation does lead directly and invariably to observable approach or withdrawal behaviors. In much human behavior, however, behavioral predispositions represent an initial input that may be overridden by other inputs generated by other approach- and avoidance-based mechanisms or processes prior to an actual behavioral response being enacted. For example, the sight of a tasty dessert stimulus may automatically evoke an approach tendency at the physiological and somatic levels, but a more deliberate consideration of one’s ever expanding waistline may lead to the overt act of pushing one’s chair away from the dinner table.

Thus, in predicting observable behavior, particularly for complex organisms such as humans, with their flexible and creative self-regulatory repertoire (e.g., delay of gratification, impulse control, goal setting), one must consider the operation of multiple levels of approach and avoidance motivation (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994), both at the same level of representation (Miller, 1944) and in hierarchical fashion (Elliot & Church, 1997). Indeed, in human behavior, approach and avoidance mechanisms and processes are multifarious, operating across the neouraxis from rudimentary reflexes to vaunted cortical processes (Berntson et al., 1993; Elliot & Thrash, 2002).
This prevalence of approach and avoidance mechanisms and processes bespeaks the central role of approach and avoidance motivation in survival and adaptation.

In sum, approach and avoidance motivation is manifest in and fundamental to all organisms, from protozoa to human beings. The greater the complexity of the organism, the greater the number and complexity of the approach–avoidance mechanisms and processes involved in the production and regulation of behavior. Given the fundamental nature of approach and avoidance motivation, and its ubiquitous presence in biological and psychological functioning, it seems reasonable to consider the approach–avoidance distinction an organizing principle in the study motivation (Berntson et al., 1993). That is, the approach–avoidance distinction may be seen as a unifying thread that can be applied to most, if not all, motivational concepts and constructs. As such, this distinction holds tremendous integrative, interpretive, and generative potential. The approach–avoidance distinction is certainly not sufficient to account for motivation, but it is necessary, and its broad and deep application is likely to yield much theoretical fruit.

DEFINITION AND CONCEPTUALIZATION

At the beginning of this chapter, I offered the following definition of approach and avoidance motivation: Approach motivation may be defined as the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior toward, positive stimuli (objects, events, possibilities), whereas avoidance motivation may be defined as the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior away from, negative stimuli (objects, events, possibilities). It may be helpful to elaborate on several aspects of this definition, given the fact that approach–avoidance motivation is rarely defined in explicit fashion.

First, being a motivational distinction, approach–avoidance encompasses both the energization and direction of behavior. Energization refers to the initial activation, instigation, or “spring to action” (James, 1890, p. 555) that orients the organism in a general way (Elliot, 1997). This energization may be very rudimentary, as in the amoeba’s evolutionarily engrained orienting away from bright light, or may be more complex, as in the human being’s dispositional tendency to orient toward an achievement task as a function of past socialization in competence-relevant settings. Importantly, this use of energization does not presume that the organism is passive until instigated to action; on the contrary, the organism is viewed as perpetually active, with instigation functionally representing a shift from one form of orienting to another (Atkinson & Birch, 1970). Direction herein refers to the guiding or channeling of behavior in a precise way. This guiding and channeling is typically in the service of an activated desire or concern (Elliot & Thrash, 2001).

Second, inherent in the approach–avoidance distinction is the concept of physical or psychological movement. Positively evaluated stimuli are associated with an approach orientation to bring or keep the stimulus close to the organism (literally or figuratively), whereas negatively evaluated stimuli are associated with an avoidance orientation to push or keep the stimulus away from the organism (literally or figuratively). As noted earlier, although positively and negatively evaluated stimuli produce (at minimum) a physiological and somatic preparedness for physical movement toward or away from the stimuli, respectively (Arnold, 1960; Corwin, 1921), this preparedness may or may not be translated directly into overt behavior. In advanced organisms, initial approach or avoidance inclinations may even be overridden or channeled in the opposite direction of the initial inclination (Elliot & Church, 1997).

Third, implicit in the aforementioned point is the notion that movement toward a positive stimulus and movement away from a negative stimulus each has two distinguishable forms. “Movement toward” can represent getting something positive that is currently absent or it can represent keeping something positive that is currently present (functionally, continuing toward). Likewise, “movement away” can represent keeping away from something negative that is currently absent (functionally, continuing away from) or it can represent getting away from something negative that is currently present (for a conceptual parallel, Herzberg, 1966). Thus, approach motivation not only encompasses promoting new positive situations, but also maintaining and sustaining existing positive situations, and avoidance motivation not only encompasses preventing new negative situations, but also escaping from and rectifying existing negative situations.

Fourth, positive or negative valence is construed as the conceptual core of the approach–avoidance distinction. A stimulus is positively or negatively evaluated by the organism, and this produces inclinations and efforts to approach or avoid the stimulus. “Positive” and “negative” are presumed to take on somewhat different meanings in different contexts, including beneficial/harmful, liked/disliked, and desirable/undesirable. Research indicates that these dimensions are conceptually and empirically comparable to a high degree, although some empirical work suggests that they may be separable in certain instances (Berridge, 1999). At present, given their substantial comparability, it seems best to construe beneficial/harmful, liked/disliked,
and desirable/undesirable as functionally equivalent dimensions that may be subsumed under the positive/negative rubric (i.e., in essence, the three dimensions are conceptualized as indicators of a positive or negative latent variable). Nevertheless, it is possible that subsequent research will establish a need to distinguish among these dimensions in defining the approach–avoidance distinction.

Fifth, “stimuli” as used herein may represent concrete, observable objects/events/possibilities, or they may represent abstract, internally generated representations of objects/events/possibilities. Furthermore, stimuli are meant to connote an essentially limitless, idiographic array of focal objects/events/possibilities.

**TERMINOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Many different terms and labels have been used over the years to cover the basic conceptual space that is covered by the definition of approach and avoidance motivation offered herein. Each of the different designations tends to be associated with a somewhat different emphasis. Three of the most common of these designations are considered in the following, in addition to approach–avoidance.

**Hedonism (i.e., pleasure–pain).** Hedonism has been conceptualized in many different ways in the philosophical and psychological literatures. In philosophy, the ancient Greeks, such as the Epicureans, used the term quite broadly to refer to seeking the pleasures and avoiding the pains of both the mind and the body, whereas the British empiricists used the term more narrowly to refer to the pleasures and pains of bodily sensation (Boring, 1950; Cofer & Appley, 1964). In psychology, hedonism has typically been defined in a narrow sense in terms of bodily sensation and experienced affect (Franken, 1994; Young, 1961). Rozin (1999) has recently proposed a more inclusive view of hedonism, defining pleasure as “a positive experienced state that we seek and that we try to maintain or enhance” and pain as “a negative experienced state that we avoid and that we try to reduce or eliminate” (p. 112). This more inclusive view of hedonism is more akin to the conceptualization of approach–avoidance motivation herein than is the normative view of hedonism in the psychological literature. Rozin’s definition remains narrower than that presented herein, however, in that he uses the term “experienced” to refer to conscious experience, whereas nonconscious and even reflexive processes are included under the approach–avoidance rubric in the present definition.

**Approach–withdrawal.** The approach–withdrawal distinction was introduced to the psychological literature by Schneirla (1959), a comparative psychologist. Schneirla argued that motivational analyses should be grounded in overt behavioral actions, so that they are applicable to lower as well as higher organisms. Thus, he conceptualized approach and withdrawal motivation in terms of observable behavior toward stimuli and away from stimuli, respectively (i.e., approach–withdrawal motivation and observable physical movement were considered isomorphic). Davidson and colleagues (Davidson, 1992; Sutton & Davidson, 1997; Tomarken, Davidson, Wheeler, & Doss, 1992) currently utilize the approach–withdrawal distinction in broader fashion to refer to action tendencies as well as overt action per se. Approach and withdrawal tendencies are presumed to be grounded in differential cortical activation. Approach tendencies are linked to activation of the left prefrontal cortex, whereas withdrawal tendencies are linked to activation of the right prefrontal cortex. These approach–withdrawal tendencies are posited to be the foundational dimensions of emotional experience. The conceptualization of approach–avoidance proffered herein is similar to Davidson and colleagues’ conceptualization of approach–withdrawal, in that approach–avoidance refers to action tendencies as well as overt action per se. However, their approach–withdrawal distinction is narrower than the approach–avoidance distinction espoused herein, in that approach–withdrawal focuses on the issue of energization at the biological level, whereas approach–avoidance herein covers both energization and direction, and is applicable to biologically based and psychologically based processes across the neuraxis.

**Appetite–aversion.** The “appetite–aversion” distinction was coined by Craig (1918), who conceptualized appetites and aversions in terms of internal states of agitation (i.e., energization) accompanied by a readiness to “consume” the “appeted” stimulus or “get rid of” the “disturbing” stimulus (pp. 93–94). Craig focused primarily on physiological instincts in his theorizing, and considered basic reflexive mechanisms to be outside the purview of his appetite–aversion analysis (as did Tolman (1932) who explicitly embraced Craig’s distinction). In the contemporary literature, Lang and colleagues (Lang, 1995; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1997) utilize the appetite–aversion distinction in their analysis of emotion and reflexive behavior. Emotion is characterized as a motivationally tuned state of action readiness, and two basic brain systems are posited to underlie emotion: appetitive (consummatory) and aversive (defensive). Reflexive behaviors are also characterized in terms of the appetitive–aversive distinction. In both instances, appetitive is meant to connote consummatory and approach
oriented, whereas aversive is meant to connote defensive and avoidance oriented. More complex, “tactical” behavior is also thought to be organized in terms of this appetitive–aversive distinction, but little detail is offered in this regard (interestingly, approach–avoidance terminology per se is utilized when “tactical” behavior is briefly discussed; Lang, 1995, p. 373). The conceptualization of approach–avoidance offered herein is similar to Lang and colleagues’ conceptualization of appetitive–aversive in that the approach–avoidance distinction is viewed as applicable to reflexive behavior. Indeed, given Lang and colleagues’ incorporation of “tactical” behavior under the appetitive–aversive rubric, the two distinctions under consideration primarily differ in terms of emphasis. Reflexive behavior has been the central focus of the appetitive–aversive distinction, whereas it is simply one of many levels under consideration in the approach–avoidance distinction.

Approach–avoidance. The approach–avoidance distinction emerged from Kurt Lewin’s work on Field Theory, specifically his conceptualization of the forces that accompany positive and negative valences. Lewin (1935) posited that stimuli have positive or attracting properties, or negative or repelling properties (i.e., valences) that are linked directly to tendencies to approach or avoid the stimuli. These positive and negative valences usually emerge from the organism’s needs, meaning that approach and avoidance tendencies are typically activated in the service of need satisfaction. Working within a Lewinian framework, Miller (1944) helped popularize the approach–avoidance distinction with his systematic experimental research on approach–avoidance conflicts. In fact, it is not Lewin, but Miller (1937), as well as Hovland (1937) and Sears (1937), who first used the term approach–avoidance in print (in the published proceedings of an American Psychological Association symposium on conflict chaired by Clark Hull). Although, in most of Miller’s experiments, approach and avoidance were operationalized in terms of movement toward or away from an object in physical space, Miller (1944), in accord with Lewin, explicitly stated that approach and avoidance are to be understood dynamically and functionally, not spatially (Dollard & Miller, 1950). That is, the experimental work on “spatial approach or avoidance” behavior (Miller, 1944, p. 432) was designed to be a simple, concrete analog of more complex, abstract motivational processes. McClelland and colleagues (McClelland, 1951; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953) were also instrumental in establishing the approach–avoidance distinction. These theorists focused primarily on approach and avoidance motives, characterized as dispositional preferences for acquiring positive, hoped for experiences or states (e.g., the motive for success) or for avoiding negative, feared experiences or states (e.g., the motive to avoid failure). However, they also noted that the distinction between approach and avoidance motivation was applicable at the level of unlearned, reflexive mechanisms as well as motives (McClelland et al., 1953). Like Lewin (and Miller), McClelland and colleagues clearly conceptualized the approach–avoidance distinction in terms of underlying valence-based processes, rather than observable behavior per se.

In sum, it seems that the best way to cover the conceptual space under consideration is in broad fashion, and in terms of underlying motivational mechanisms and processes rather than observable behavior per se. The term “hedonism” has tended to represent a rather narrow set of psychological phenomena (i.e., sensory or affective), and the approach–withdrawal designation has typically been linked to an emphasis on physical movement as a direct indicator of motivation. Both of these terminological options seem unnecessarily restrictive. The designations “appetitive–aversive” and “approach–avoidance” have been proffered and used in highly similar fashion in the literature. Both of these designations are broadly applicable to all levels and degrees of complexity of valence-based mechanisms and processes, from the simple, constitutionally engrained instigation of fixed behavior in the single-celled amoeba to the highly complex, multiply determined, flexible regulation of the human being. Thus, from a conceptual standpoint, either of these options would suffice. Approach–avoidance has been selected herein because it is the more widely recognized of the two designations in the motivational literature, and because it is the easier of the two options to intuitively understand (particularly for the newcomer to the literature).

OVERVIEW OF THE HANDBOOK OF APPROACH AND AVOIDANCE MOTIVATION

The present volume is designed as a broad overview of research and theory on approach and avoidance motivation. Given the breadth of applicability of the approach–avoidance distinction, the breadth of the coverage in the handbook is substantial, encompassing a multitude of different constructs, levels of analysis, and disciplines. This breadth of coverage bears testimony to the foundational and pervasive importance of the approach–avoidance distinction in motivational accounts of behavior.

The scholars who have provided chapters to the handbook are widely recognized as outstanding contributors in their area of expertise. This is truly a stellar lineup,
and they have, without exception, written excellent, cutting edge, insightful chapters that individually and corporately do justice to the topic of approach–avoidance motivation.

The first part of the Handbook is comprised of a single introductory chapter that provides an overview of the approach–avoidance motivational distinction. The second part grounds approach–avoidance in neurophysiology and neurobiology, covering a broad range of topics that include brain systems and mechanisms, cortical asymmetry, cortex-reflex connections, subcortical processes, neurotransmitters, hormones, and olfaction. Part three shifts to a variety of topics relevant to different types and levels of analysis, including basic personality dispositions (including traits and temperaments) in both human and nonhuman animals, the genetic basis of basic dispositions, domain-specific (i.e., achievement and social) motives and goals, and situation-specific motivational states. Part four focuses on the evaluative processes that make approach and avoidance such an integral aspect of motivated behavior; topics include the evolutionary basis of evaluation, the immediacy and automaticity of evaluation, the structure of evaluation, and asymmetries in evaluative processes.

The fifth part of the Handbook covers emotion and well-being, including the structure of emotions, the function of emotions, distinct emotional experience, the specific emotion of anger, and the general concept of psychological well-being. The sixth part focuses on cognition, specifically the topics of challenge and threat appraisal, mental control, orienting and attentional processes, and the framing of information. Part seven encompasses various topics relevant to the self, specifically, self-regulation, self-esteem and the self-concept, self-knowledge, and access to the self. The eighth and final part of the handbook covers the area of social context, including culture, stereotyping, and neurobiology, covering a broad range of topics that include brain systems and mechanisms, cortical asymmetry, cortex-reflex connections, subcortical processes, neurotransmitters, hormones, and olfaction. Part three shifts to a variety of topics relevant to different types and levels of analysis, including basic personality dispositions (including traits and temperaments) in both human and nonhuman animals, the genetic basis of basic dispositions, domain-specific (i.e., achievement and social) motives and goals, and situation-specific motivational states. Part four focuses on the evaluative processes that make approach and avoidance such an integral aspect of motivated behavior; topics include the evolutionary basis of evaluation, the immediacy and automaticity of evaluation, the structure of evaluation, and asymmetries in evaluative processes.

Clearly much ground is covered in the handbook; this breadth of coverage nicely illustrates the widespread influence of the simple but powerful approach–avoidance distinction. Those new to this area will undoubtedly be astounded by how a seemingly simple distinction can be so enduring and generative. I believe that those who are seasoned veterans working in this area will also find much to learn in the pages herein.

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