

### Getting all in a muddle over motivation

The most highly influential – and hardly ever challenged – model of human motivation is Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs'. (The figure of it included here shows how it has been extended.) Maslow's premise is that the more basic the motivation the more we wish to get the satiation of it out of the way, so that we can free ourselves to aspire to finer things. The idea therefore is that we have to respond to and satiate a given layer of motivation before we can try to respond to and satiate the next layer above it. So to be in a position to aspire to 'the higher things in life' we have to go through a staged process of dealing with the various layers lower down the pyramid.

The model has a fatal problem: a basic failure to understand motivation (caused by Maslow's 'humanistic' philosophical beliefs). What he misses is that our more rarefied behaviours have evolved for the purpose of progressively fine-tuning the way that we respond to our essential motivations. They are not removed from them to live some sort of life of their own. Why otherwise would we have them? The pyramidal model should in effect have sex/reproduction at both its base and its apex, because all that we do has to be in some way instrumental to this function; however far away, and however much it may seem to have 'short-circuited' into its own positive feedback loop. All that we do in the end is successful in terms of how it furthers sex/reproduction over some timescale. Motivation necessarily is an interconnected tree, not a series of separate levels. It is impossible to get a handle on any biological system (including the human animal) without an evolutionary understanding.

