

# Introduction

## Stress: It's not what you think it is

Life is demanding, and our emotional states of mind are the results of demanding things. The concept of demand is core to our understanding of how we behave, and the emotions that impel us *to* behave. For the stresses of life, demand is key. If demand surpasses our ability to cope, we become tense and stressed. But rest or relaxation is also a function of demand. By passively focusing or meditating on an object, phrase, or bodily movement, a 'relaxation response' follows that mitigates or inhibits the tension that is core to stress.

Like the jerk of a knee, tension and relaxation are reflexive things, and the concept of stress, its causes and cures, derive from this simple Pavlovian metaphor of stimulus and response. For the general anxieties and stress which beset us in our workaday world, the problem is that this metaphor, at once so simple yet critical to our understanding of stress, is utterly and completely *wrong*. Contrary to academic and popular opinion, the daily tensions that beset us are not reflexive, nor are they 'pulled' from us in any way, and the opposite of tension or relaxation springs into being through literally no demand at all. If our core notions of what stress is are wrong then how we understand and apply its remedies must also change, and I will demonstrate, change significantly for the better.

But to arrive at a better 'cure' for stress requires a better explanation for stress that is found ultimately in our neurology, and the principles of motivation that provide the metaphorical codes that map how our brains and bodies, as integrated systems, work. The arguments that I will present are for the most part not new, but they have been scarcely debated, are rarely voiced, and are provocative to a psychological community that almost without exception looks to another view that is arguably more acceptable because it is more profitable.

This new view of stress is simple, sensible, neurologically sound, resistant to human cupidity (i.e no expensive training necessary) and most importantly is readily falsified by academic and common folk alike. And if it is right, then psychology will never be the same.