



What is a 'mechanism'?

A distinction between two sub-types of mechanistic explanations

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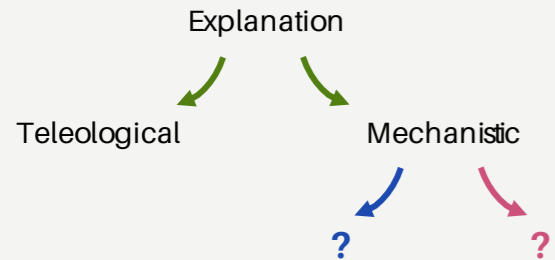
Background

There are two broad classes of explanation.



Are there also meaningful subtypes?

Some philosophers argue that *mechanistic explanations* may contain two distinct kinds of explanation.

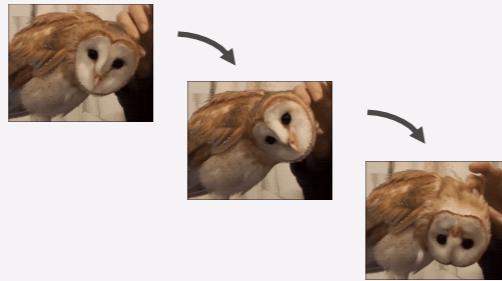


Our question

Do people distinguish between **etiological** and **constitutive** mechanisms?

Design

This owl has an unusual neck. It can twist its neck almost all the way around in a circle.



Which question would you rather have answered?

How did its neck come to exist?

Etiological

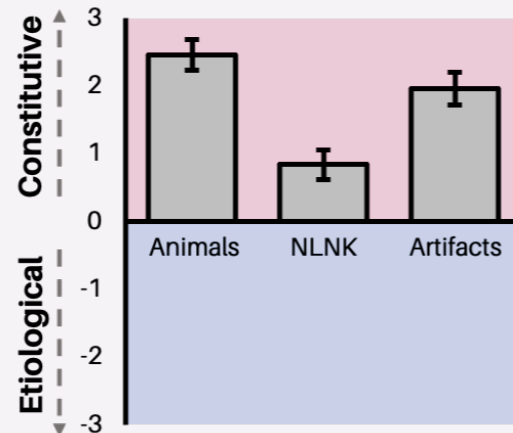
OR

How does this twisting process work?

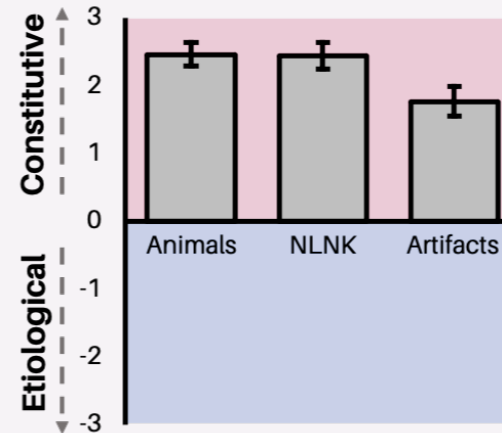
Constitutive

Results

"Which question would you rather have answered?"



"Which explanation is more informative?"



Implications

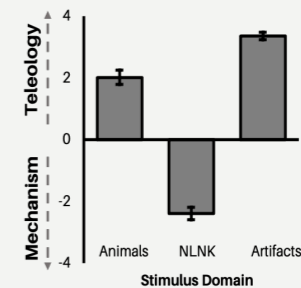
People differentiate between **etiological** and **constitutive** mechanisms.

They tend to prefer constitutive over etiological mechanisms.

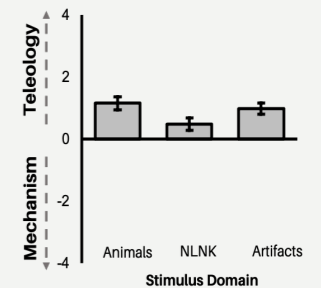
Do people prefer **teleological** or **mechanistic** explanations?

The answer may depend on the kind of mechanism in question.

Etiological vs. Teleo Questions



Constitutive vs. Teleo Questions



To find out more...
<https://psyarxiv.com/qczb7/>