
Towards a new evolutionary psychology

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Abstract

Standard evolutionary psychology [SEP] takes itself to be pulling aside the curtain of illusory motivations of contemporary human behavior to reveal the true biological ones. It claims that our contemporary human minds and social organizations are, in a very real sense, fixed evolutionary adaptations. I have two goals in this paper. My first is to propose a revision to the primary method of SEP—namely, *psychological reverse engineering*. This method involves generating hypotheses about our essential psychological mechanisms selected for in the distant past. The said function of these mechanisms was to solve recurrent adaptive problems (e.g. jealousy as a solution to male sexual competition). On my revision, the contemporary functional roles of any posited psychological process should be characterized alongside a characterization of their possible roles in our evolutionary past. This would allow for a comparison between contemporary psychobiological functions and possible past functions to better assess their purported historical fixity. My second goal in this paper is to extend SEP's way of "biologizing" ethics to include phenomena that do not fit a *kin selection* model well. Drawing from biological leverage theory (Barker 2008) and the work of feminist evolutionists, niche constructionists, and developmental systems theorists, I show by ethological example that selection often favors the evolution of minds that can help non-genetic relatives. I conclude with a brief analysis of the evolution of *empathy* in the context of a methodological revised and theoretically expanded *new evolutionary psychology*.

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