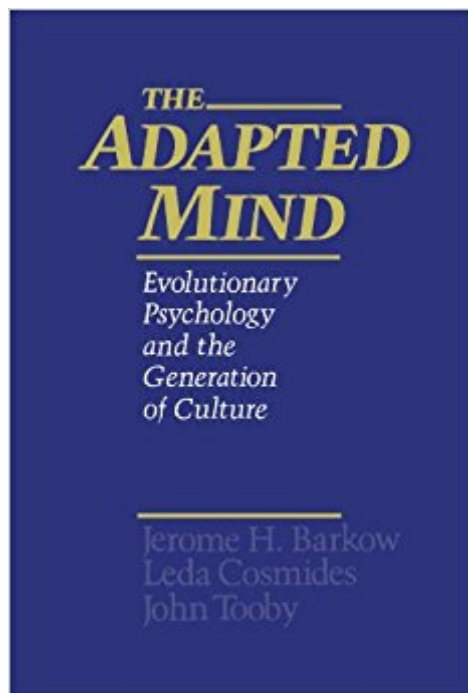




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The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology And The Generation Of Culture



Synopsis

Although researchers have long been aware that the species-typical architecture of the human mind is the product of our evolutionary history, it has only been in the last three decades that advances in such fields as evolutionary biology, cognitive psychology, and paleoanthropology have made the fact of our evolution illuminating. Converging findings from a variety of disciplines are leading to the emergence of a fundamentally new view of the human mind, and with it a new framework for the behavioral and social sciences. First, with the advent of the cognitive revolution, human nature can finally be defined precisely as the set of universal, species-typical information-processing programs that operate beneath the surface of expressed cultural variability. Second, this collection of cognitive programs evolved in the Pleistocene to solve the adaptive problems regularly faced by our hunter-gatherer ancestors--problems such as mate selection, language acquisition, cooperation, and sexual infidelity. Consequently, the traditional view of the mind as a general-purpose computer, tabula rasa, or passive recipient of culture is being replaced by the view that the mind resembles an intricate network of functionally specialized computers, each of which imposes contentful structure on human mental organization and culture. The Adapted Mind explores this new approach--evolutionary psychology--and its implications for a new view of culture.

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Customer Reviews

"There are two kinds of landmark publications in science: those that open a new era, like Darwin's Origin of Species, or those that mark an important waypoint in a scientific revolution that has already

begun. The Adapted Mind is an example of the latter, comprising as it does a collection of eighteen papers by twenty-five authors which sum up and illustrate much of the best of our knowledge in the field of evolutionary psychology." --Christopher Baddock, London School of Economics, ESS Newsletter

Although researchers have long been aware that the species-typical architecture of the human mind is the product of our evolutionary history, it has only been in the last three decades that advances in such fields as evolutionary biology, cognitive psychology, and paleoanthropology have made the fact of our evolution illuminating. Converging findings from a variety of disciplines are leading to the emergence of a fundamentally new view of the human mind, and with it a new framework for the behavioral and social sciences. First, with the advent of the cognitive revolution, human nature can finally be defined precisely as the set of universal, species-typical information-processing programs that operate beneath the surface of expressed cultural variability. Second, this collection of cognitive programs evolved in the Pleistocene to solve the adaptive problems regularly faced by our hunter-gatherer ancestors - problems such as mate selection, language acquisition, co-operation, and sexual infidelity. Consequently, the traditional view of the mind as a general-purpose computer, tabula rasa, or passive recipient of culture is being replaced by the view that the mind resembles an intricate network of functionally specialized computers, each of which imposes contentful structure on human mental organization and culture. The Adapted Mind explores this new approach - evolutionary psychology - and its implications for a new view of culture.

This is one of the earliest texts in the field called Evolutionary Psychology (EP). This specialization evolved from what Edward O. Wilson termed "Sociobiology" in the mid-1970s. EP applies the logic of sociobiology to human psychology. That is, how has natural selection shaped how humans think and make decisions? As editors Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, and Jerome Barkow put it (page 7): "Evolutionary psychology is psychology informed by the fact that the inherited architecture of the human mind is the product of the evolutionary process." The book, in their conceptualization, has two goals (page 3): "The first is to introduce the newly crystallizing field of evolutionary psychology to a wider audience. . . The second goal of this volume is to clarify how this new field. . . supplies the necessary connection between evolutionary biology and the complex, irreducible social and cultural phenomena studied by anthropologists, economists, and historians." They locate their perspective by juxtaposing evolutionary psychology with what the term "the standard social scientific model." The chapter by Tooby and Cosmides (Chapter 1) outlines this model in much more detail. As we

know, the SSSM insists that, for all practical purposes, human nature - and thus human behavior - is shaped by culture. Put less laconically, the SSSM rests on three cardinal tenets - two of them explicit, the third usually implicit. These are: (1) that humans have no innate behavioral tendencies; (2) that, consequently, human nature is solely the product of learning and socialization (in short, of "nurture"); from which it follows (3) that human nature (and consequently human behavior) is essentially quite malleable (my rendering of the perspective). Of course, evolutionary psychology moves in a different direction, emphasizing the effects of the evolutionary process on human behavior and thinking. This edited volume includes a series of chapters exploring different aspects of human behavior. The section titles illustrate the variety of topics covered: Section II focuses on cooperation and social exchange, noting that these have evolutionary bases; III examines the psychology of mating and sex; IV looks at parental care and children; V considers perception and language as evolutionary adaptations; VI takes a look at environmental aesthetics (such as evolved responses to landscapes); VII has only one chapter--looking at the evolution of psychodynamic mechanisms. The volume closes with an essay by Jerome Barkow. Not all readers will be convinced by the arguments raised in this volume. However, it serves an important purpose by unapologetically claiming that we cannot understand much of human psychology (and other social behaviors) without considering human evolution. Indeed, it is hard to complain about this overarching perspective. However, readers may well dispute specific applications of the perspective. In the end, this is a rich volume and will prod the reader to think differently about "human nature."

This is deep stuff, not for your average lay audience but if you are into cognitive and evolutionary psychology you must get this. The opening essay on why the social science should and often don't pay attention to scientific and evolutionary concepts was just incredible. I'm not exaggerating to say it literally changed the way I view the social sciences in a fundamental way. Any academic in the social sciences should read this book. And given the technical depth it is very readable. Highest recommendation.

This book is a massive tome on evolutionary factors that influence human behavior. It begins with clarification of the kind of Darwinism the authors appeal to, so that everyone is on the same page, and considers the general psychological foundations of Darwinism on culture. The book then moves on to discuss cognitive adaptations for social exchange, citing human and non-human examples. The book also includes the evolutionary psychology of mating and sex, examining preferences for

mate selection and competition, mechanisms for sexual attraction, and the evolutionary use of women as chattel (something any Old Testament and Quran reader can relate to). A significant portion of the book is devoted to parental care and children, examining how pregnancy sickness, patterns between twins, maternal-infant vocalizations, and child play in the form of chasing each other are all evolutionary mechanisms that continue to be featured. Steven Pinker adds an essay on natural language and natural selection; Roger Shepard contributes an essay on the man's perceptual adaptation to the natural world; both of which demonstrate the interconnectedness between perception, language, and adaptation. The book concludes with some of its most esoteric issues: environmental aesthetics, intrapsychic processes, and the theoretical implications of cultural phenomena. The whole book, while not necessarily over-academic, is ultimately dense reading. Most of the concepts and conceptualizations require mental work to apprehend, while the statistics and empirical evidence are clearly described. While drawing from many disparate areas of evolutionary biology, all the essays find their ultimate significance in how the mind, in particular, has adapted to environmental forces. A demanding, but fascinating, read.

What can I say? This is THE book, the apolitical manifesto, the thing that made me choose to get a PhD at Santa Barbara. Unfortunately, everything but the first chapter is illustration and example of the larger point, but if you want to debate evolutionary psychology with someone I think it's perfectly reasonable to expect your opponent to have read and understood Psychological Foundations of Culture (chapter 1).

Good book

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