



Evolutionary Psychology as Maladapted Psychology (Life and Mind: Philosophical Issues in Biology and Psychology)

Robert C. Richardson

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Human beings, like other organisms, are the products of evolution. Like other organisms, we exhibit traits that are the product of natural selection. Our psychological capacities are evolved traits as much as are our gait and posture. This much few would dispute. Evolutionary psychology goes further than this, claiming that our psychological traits -- including a wide variety of traits, from mate preference and jealousy to language and reason -- can be understood as specific adaptations to ancestral Pleistocene conditions. In *Evolutionary Psychology as Maladapted Psychology*, Robert Richardson takes a critical look at evolutionary psychology by subjecting its ambitious and controversial claims to the same sorts of methodological and evidential constraints that are broadly accepted within evolutionary biology. The claims of evolutionary psychology may pass muster as psychology; but what are their evolutionary credentials? Richardson considers three ways adaptive hypotheses can be evaluated, using examples from the biological literature to illustrate what sorts of evidence and methodology would be necessary to establish specific evolutionary and adaptive explanations of human psychological traits. He shows that existing explanations within evolutionary psychology fall woefully short of accepted biological standards. The theories offered by evolutionary psychologists may identify traits that are, or were, beneficial to humans. But gauged by biological standards, there is inadequate evidence: evolutionary psychologists are largely silent on the evolutionary evidence relevant to assessing their claims, including such matters as variation in ancestral populations, heritability, and the advantage offered to our ancestors. As evolutionary claims they are unsubstantiated. Evolutionary psychology, Richardson concludes, may offer a program of research, but it lacks the kind of evidence that is generally expected within evolutionary biology. It is speculation rather than sound science -- and we should treat its claims with skepticism.

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