

Evolutionary psychology (Abstract)

The papers in this selection present one of the newest directions in psychological science, the trend to interpret human mental life with regard to its evolutionary formation. The true interdisciplinary nature of the enterprise is shown by the fact that beside psychologists, biologists, philosophers and even a literary scholar had something to say. Guest editor, Csaba Pléh highlights some of the divisive points in this new trends, and how they relate to classical issues such as body-mind relationship, rivaling causal models in psychology, and so on. Tamás Bereczkei, László Nemes and Péter Molnár give a theoretical analysis of the mainstream EP. In their critical remarks they emphasize that a more comparative, less modular, and more developmental evolutionary interpretation of mental life, together with an alliance between neuroscience and EP would be welcome. György Kampis goes further in his theoretical contribution: he points out that dynamic models of cognition and evolutionary thinking combined give way for conceptually new models of the body-mind relation as well, where the human body is taken in its integrity as the reference point of epistemology.

Eörs Szathmáry analyses the new models of the emergence of language. He points out that substantial coevolutionary processes should be envisaged in this domain, and also some new, less localistic theories are needed for realizing the special type of representation of human language in the brain.

Papers by experimental psychologists take up specific mental processes from an evolutionary perspective. Ilona Kovács shows homologies between animal spatial learning and human perceptual awareness: the impossibility of seeing two things at the same time or at the same place are driving forces in spatial orientation and binocular vision as well. Gergely Csibra and György Gergely summarize their studies on infant perception of action. At 9-month they obtained evidence for an intentional interpretation of moving objects in babies. Now, they claim, however, that this is preceded by a teleological stance. Goal based interpretations are primary, and only later supplemented by intention attribution. This latter process is certainly central to human thinking. As Miklós Györi shows by analyzing data from autistic children, problems with mentalization and intention attribution are the leading modular interpretive schemata for this serious condition. Bernadette Péley shows that evolutionary thinking enters the pathological domain in softer forms as well. She proposes an interesting combination of attachment theory and narrative constructions, claiming that narrative representation of attachment events is a major causal factor in some forms of pathology. Evolutionary ideas spread over to the humanities as well. Paul Hernadi shows that proposals about the pleasure function of literature lead to evolutionary considerations about the birth of literary form.