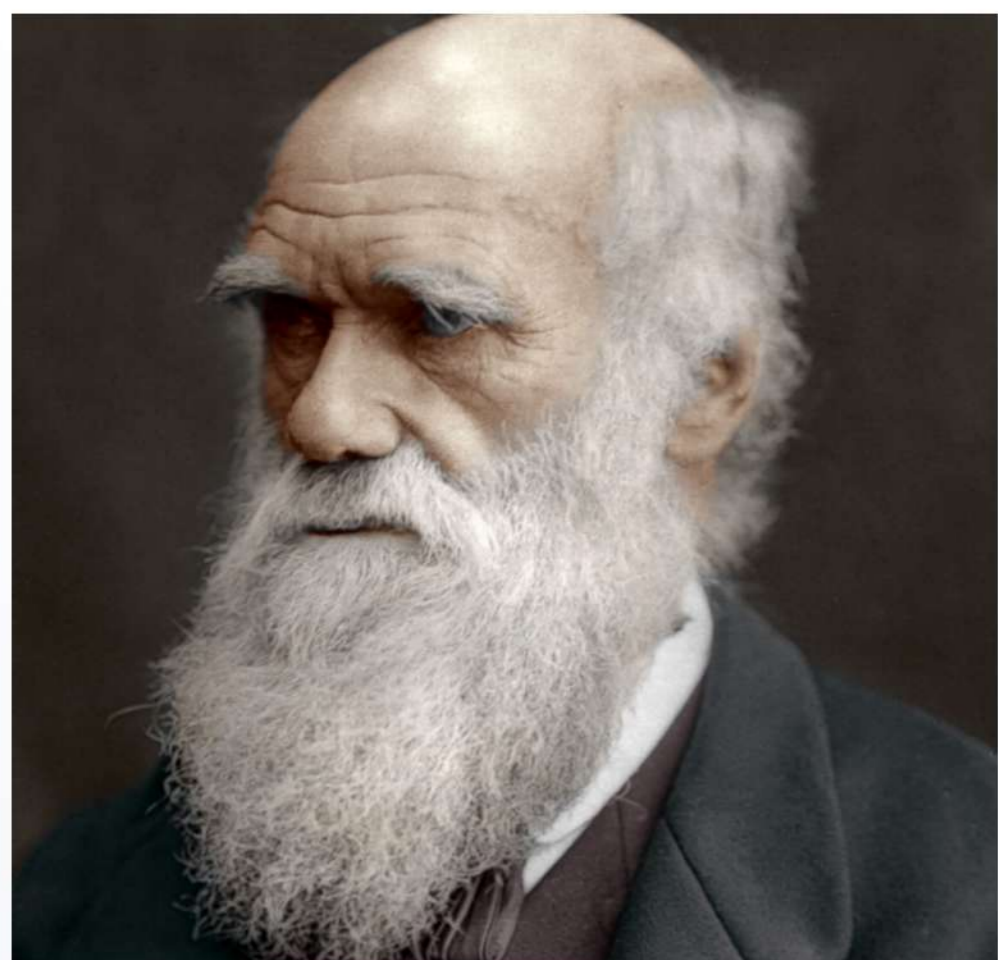


The Evolutionary Psychiatry Special Interest Group (EPSIG)

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/special-interest-groups/evolutionary-psychiatry/>

Aims and Objectives



- Raise awareness of the value of understanding the contribution of evolutionary theory to psychiatry
- Encourage research into evolutionary aspects of psychiatry
- Provide a forum for psychiatrists and others to discuss evolutionary models, research ideas and data with fellow evolutionists
- Facilitate networking with academic institutions and evolutionary scientists, biologists, psychotherapists, psychologists and other disciplines such as philosophy
- Keep members and supporters of the SIG informed via our webpage and newsletter
- Organise workshops, symposia and conferences on evolutionary psychiatry and related subjects
- Organise sessions at the WPA and the College's International Congress, as well as with Faculties and Devolved Nations and Divisions.

BJPsych

The British Journal of Psychiatry (2019)
Page 1 of 3. doi: 10.1192/bjp.2019.123

Editorial

Evolutionary biology: an essential basic science for the training of the next generation of psychiatrists

Riadh Abed, Agnes Ayton, Paul St John-Smith, Annie Swanepoel and Derek K. Tracy



Summary

Evolutionary science can serve as the high-level organising principle for understanding psychiatry. Evolutionary concepts generate new models and ideas for future psychiatric study, research, policy and therapy. The authors accordingly make the case for the inclusion of evolutionary biology in the postgraduate education of psychiatric trainees.

Keywords

Evolutionary biology; psychiatric training; evolutionary causality; education and training; aetiology.

Copyright and usage

© The Royal College of Psychiatrists 2019.

Declaration of interest

None.

Evolutionary psychiatry: a new College special interest group

Riadh Abed, Paul St John-Smith

BJPsych Bulletin (2016), 40, 233-236, doi: 10.1192/pb.bp.115.052407

Evolutionary science remains an overlooked area in psychiatry and medicine. The newly established Royal College of Psychiatrists' Evolutionary Psychiatry Special Interest Group aims to reverse this trend by raising the profile of evolutionary thinking among College members and others further afield. Here we provide a brief outline of the importance of the evolutionary approach to both the theory and practice of psychiatry and for future research.

What the evolutionary approach may offer

Why is the evolutionary approach relevant to psychiatry? To date, psychiatry has operated without an accepted unifying framework and has been characterised by a plurality of approaches, some of which are diametrically at odds with each other. This pluralism may be presented by some as a sign of strength and vibrancy but it is more likely in our view to be a sign of conceptual weakness. This weakness is exemplified by the lack of the most rudimentary rules about the function of the human mind. The consequences of this state of unconstrained pluralism are that any theory, however irrational, can demand equal attention.

Evolutionary science helps resolve these issues as it recognises two categories of causation: proximate (mechanism and ontogeny) and ultimate or evolutionary (phylogenetic and function). These are reflected in Tinbergen's four questions. Proximate causes are the answer to the 'how' question and are the primary focus of non-evolutionary science, whereas ultimate causation is the answer to the 'why' question. Ultimate or evolutionary causation is a perspective which is unique to evolutionary science and theories of ultimate causation will be compatible with a whole range of proximate causes. Neuroscience has made significant advances in exploring the proximate causes of psychopathology but relatively few studies have addressed evolutionary or ultimate causes of traits or disorders.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is reviewing the postgraduate curriculum following the UK General Medical Council's direction. The curriculum is expected to meet the standards set by the 'Generic Professional Capabilities Framework' (GPC). We argue that developments in evolutionary biology are compelling and their inclusion long overdue, as part of Domain 3 of the GCP (professional knowledge).

Evolutionary science assists psychiatrists in identifying disease and disorder by structuring an integrated theoretical framework of adaptive human functioning. Evolutionary perspectives clarify the formulation of questions regarding the causes of human vulnerability to mental disorder. Importantly, recognising that natural selection works through survival and reproductive success and not through good health, happiness or longevity, explains the nature of many psychobiological phenomena including those accompanied by great suffering.

Some of the benefits of evolutionary thinking are as follows:

- asking new questions about why evolution has left us all vulnerable to mental disorders;
- providing a way to think clearly about development and the ways that early experiences influence later characteristics;
- providing a foundation for understanding emotions and their regulation;
- providing a foundation for a scientific diagnostic system;
- providing a framework for incorporating multiple causal factors that explain why some people get mental disorders and others do not.

Natural selection is the only workable explanation for the beautiful and compelling illusion of 'design' that pervades every living body and every organ. Knowledge of evolution may not be strictly useful in everyday commerce. You can live some sort of life and die without ever hearing the name of Darwin. But if, before you die, you want to understand why you lived in the first place, Darwinism is the one subject that you must study.

- John Maynard-Smith

EPSIG Executive Committee

- Paul St John-Smith (Chair)
- Agnes Ayton
- Tom Carpenter
- Riadh Abed (Treasurer)
- Nikhil Chaudhary
- Muzaffer Kaser
- Annie Swanepoel (Newsletter Editor)
- David Geaney
- Derek Tracy
- Adam Hunt
- Geoff Lawrence-Smith

