

Chapter 2 Evolutionary Theory

Summary

Chapter 2, Evolutionary Theory, provides a brief history of Darwin's life and the emergence of his theoretical ideas about evolution. Key concepts from evolutionary theory are introduced including: adaptation, natural selection, fitness, extinction, and the evolution of the human species. The bidirectional influence of complex cognitive capacities and participation in large social groups is viewed as a central feature of human evolution. Extensions of the theory in the fields of ethology and evolutionary psychology illustrate the relevance of the theory for understanding the origins and expressions of adaptive behaviors in contemporary life. Evolutionary psychology focuses particularly on the ability to analyze and solve adaptive problems. A detailed description of attachment, including its ethological origins and adaptive value, provides a link from evolutionary theory to topics in human development including parenting practices, social relationships, and the formation of intimate bonds in adolescence and adulthood. The application of the theory to the free-rider problem, a condition that arises when members of a group do not contribute to the production of a resource but share equally in its benefits, has been addressed in economic psychology, educational psychology, and organizational behavior. Strengths and weaknesses of the theory are summarized.