

## **Evolutionary Theory and Cognitive Therapy**

Paul Gilbert (ed.). New York: Springer Publishing Company ([www.springerpub.com](http://www.springerpub.com)). 2004, 190pp., \$35.95 (hardcover).

It is surprisingly rare for cognitive psychology to interface with cognitive therapy, despite the common first word. Although the therapy is theory-based, it was developed apart from basic psychological knowledge and only rarely have the twain met. There have been some past examples of cross-fertilization, such as Stein and Young (1992), Tatryn, Nadel, and Jacobs (1989), Williams (1996), Dowd (2002), Fleming, Dowd, and Heikkinen (2002), and Dowd and Courchaine (2002). In the main, however, knowledge advances in these two domains have proceeded independently.

The present book represents an ambitious and impressive attempt to tie together basic knowledge in evolutionary theory with cognitive therapy. All but one of the chapters were first published in a special topic issue of the *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly* in 2002, with the last chapter published in that journal somewhat later.

The book is divided into two sections; specific orientations and specific disorders. The former section includes general chapters linking the two domains with chapters by Paul Gilbert (Evolutionary approaches to psychopathology and cognitive therapy), Kent Bailey (Recognizing, assessing, and classifying others: Cognitive bases of evolutionary kinship therapy), and Leslie Greenberg (Evolutionary perspectives on emotion: Making sense of what we feel). The latter section includes applications to specific disorders with chapters by Robert Leahy (Pessimism and the evolution of negativity), Stefan Hofman and colleagues (Evolutionary mechanisms of fear and anxiety), Giovanni Liotti (The inner schema of borderline states and its correction during psychotherapy: A cognitive-evolutionary approach), and Sarah Bryne and colleagues (Command hallucinations: Cognitive theory, therapy, and research). Truly, some of the best-known writers in cognitive therapy are included herein.

As might be expected the individual chapters vary in their direct application to cognitive therapy, with those in the second section more directly related than those in the first. All, however, make for fascinating reading, especially for those readers (such as me) who appreciate an evolutionary perspective on human actions and thinking processes in general. There are many examples of insights that can be gained by this perspective but I'll mention one. Leahy provides evidence that Albert Ellis may have been correct when he (Ellis) argued that humans have an innate tendency to "think crookedly" because there may have been evolutionary survival advantages conferred on those proto-humans who were negativistic. In the process, Leahy also provides a fascinating economic strategy analysis of depression based on Portfolio Theory.

Cognitive structures laid down by evolutionary processes can be seen as examples of tacit (or implicit) knowledge. This implicit learning occurs through the tacit detection of co-variation of features or events in the environment and develop into *encoding algorithms* (Lewicki, Czyzewska, & Hill, 1997). What this means is that neurologically advanced organisms (such as humans) notice things that occur together and then tacitly assume that they belong together and represent reality; in other words, they develop into "inferential rules" about the nature of reality and the way it operates. Furthermore, that which occurs first is assumed to cause that which occurs later ("Ad hoc, ergo propter hoc"). Thereafter these assumptions or "rules for living" become a template or a cognitive filter which acts to screen out discrepant data and screen in confirming data, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. This process is especially pronounced in situations that are ambiguous - which most social situations are - and where a variety of

explanations might be plausible for a certain event. We often respond, when our tacit assumptions are questioned, with: “But that’s just the way things are! That’s just reality! Everyone knows that!” In other words, we find what we expect and want to find and we see what we expect and want to see. Rather than “seeing is believing,” a more accurate phrase might be “believing is seeing.”

If you have not read the original journal articles, I recommend this book very highly, not only for the information it contains but also for the heuristic power of its basic ideas. It is truly a landmark publication.

### References

- Dowd, E.T. (2002). Memory Processes in Psychotherapy: Implications for integration. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration, 12*, 233-246.
- Dowd, E.T. & Courchaine, K.E. (2002). Implicit learning, tacit knowledge, and implications for stasis and change in cognitive psychotherapy (pp. 325-344). In R.L. Leahy & E.T. Dowd (Eds.), *Clinical advances in cognitive psychotherapy*. New York: Springer.
- Fleming, K., Heikkinen, R. & Dowd, E.T. (2002). Cognitive therapy: The repair of memory. In R.L. Leahy & E.T. Dowd (Eds.), *Clinical advances in cognitive psychotherapy* (pp. 148-169). New York: Springer.
- Lewicki, P., Czyzewska, M., & Hill, T. (1997). Nonconscious information processing and personality. In D.C. Berry (Ed.), *How implicit is implicit learning?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stein, D.J. & Young, J.E. (1992). *Cognitive science and clinical disorders*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Tataryn, D.J., Nadel, L., & Jacobs, W.J. (1989). Cognitive therapy and cognitive science. In A. Freeman, K.M. Simon, L.E. Beutler, & H. Arkowitz (Eds.), *Comprehensive handbook of cognitive therapy* (pp. 83-98). New York: Plenum.
- Williams, J.M.G. (1996). Memory processes in psychotherapy. In P.M. Salkovskis (Ed.), *Frontiers of cognitive therapy* (pp. 97-113). New York: Plenum.

E. Thomas Dowd, Ph.D.  
*Department of Psychology*  
*Kent State University*  
*Kent, Ohio USA.*