

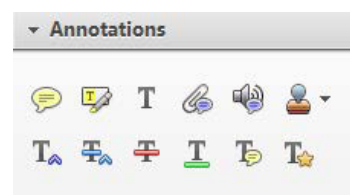
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## COMMENTARY

## Making a Case for Göbekli Tepe in Evolutionary Psychology

Raini A. Blackwell and Matthew J. Rossano  
Southeastern Louisiana University

AQ: au  
AQ:1



Göbekli Tepe holds great significance for psychology. However, we think its place in the history of psychology is still very unclear. More clarity may come by giving evolutionary psychology priority over Göbekli Tepe for the time being.

*Keywords:* evolution, Göbekli Tepe, history, philosophy

First, we would like to thank the editor for the invitation to comment on the article and we commend the author on an interesting and thought-provoking article. Though the arguments stated here may differ from those of the author, we concur that Göbekli Tepe holds great significance for psychology, and we encourage greater discussion regarding its implications for hominin cognitive evolution. That being said, we present our case that Göbekli Tepe is, at present, better situated within evolutionary psychology than the history of psychology.

AQ: 2

The evolution of psychology must not be confused with evolutionary psychology. Though both the history of psychology and evolutionary psychology provide a vital curricular foundation for the important theories that shape the way we understand human behavior, the history of psychology distinguishes itself most among the many subdisciplines of psychology because it is not concerned with teaching the theories themselves so much as understanding the who and why of their emergence. Important figures, historical events, and major schools of thought such as behaviorism, functionalism, and psychoanalysis are often the principal concepts discussed in history of psychology courses (Merced, Stutman, & Mann, 2018). Additionally, a broad requirement of instruction regarding history of psychology courses is the inclusion of the origins and development of major ideas within psychology (American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation, 2015). These topics serve to explain why the discipline of psychology functions as it does today. This is perhaps exemplified by the tendency for history of psychology classes to identify learning objectives which focus on the scientific method, professionalism, and ethics (Merced et al., 2018).

Evolutionary psychology, on the other hand, is about using Darwinian principles to understand human nature and the architecture of the human mind. What evolutionary psychology is in comparison to other schools of psychology and the factors that catalyzed its recent emergence are undoubtedly legitimate parts of the teaching of the history of psychology. However, a detailed examination and critique of its theoretical assumptions

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and major finds probably are not. Given this, the question we wish to address is whether Göbekli Tepe, as we currently understand it, is better situated in the history of psychology or evolutionary psychology.

Imagine for a moment the skills necessary for the bands of hunter–gatherers living in Turkey 12,000 years ago to construct a site as large and complicated as Göbekli Tepe. Included among these skills would likely be abstract thinking and planning abilities along with the capacity to convey complicated messages to others about the construction, arrangement, and meaning of the massive pillars at Göbekli Tepe and the iconography on them. This being the case, there is little doubt that Göbekli Tepe represents an important step in the evolution of the human psyche. Understanding this step seems uncontroversially to be within the domain of evolutionary psychology. The case for it to be included as part of the history of psychology is, in our view, a bit more strained. For the history of psychology to be at the forefront of evaluating Göbekli Tepe, would we not need some evidence that there was a pervasive psychological or philosophical school of thought (perhaps say, something akin to Romanticism or Stoicism) prevalent at the site?

As we see it, one of the advantages that evolutionary psychology has in this matter is it is not as chronologically confined as the history of psychology. The author's principle question is where should the history of psychology start? Could we go as far back as early hominins who, because of their cooperative nature, must have studied one another's behavior in an effort to increase their own fitness, or would a fairer starting point be 12,000 years ago with Göbekli Tepe given the implied shift of social intelligence required to build the site? But in both cases, what is lacking is evidence that individuals were practicing some coherent prescientific school of psychological or philosophical thought—a requirement, in our view, for inclusion within the history of psychology.

The birth of modern psychology is most commonly associated with the late 19th century and figures such as Wilhelm Wundt and William James (Mandler, 2011; Toulmin & Leary, 1985). However, a large majority of history of psychology courses and texts include psychology's philosophical antecedents as part of their subject matter. Indeed, a study examining syllabi of multiple history of psychology graduate level courses found that at least 66.7% involved discussions of antiquity, often focusing on Greek philosophers (Merced et al., 2018). It seems generally agreed that philosophical speculation on human nature and the human mind formed the intellectual groundwork from which scientific psychology arose. In some cases, these philosophical movements possessed aspects that presaged elements of modern psychology. For example, it has been argued that early forms of self-examination by Stoic philosophers were akin to the introspective methodology of the first scientific psychologists (Graiver, 2019). Furthermore, Cavanna (2019) has argued that the practices of Hellenistic philosophy, including that of the Stoics, represented an early form of psychotherapy, similar in some ways to cognitive–behavioral therapy.

Thus, a criterion that appears to make ancient philosophy a legitimate part of the history of psychology is that it contains distinguishable coherent schools of thought (Platonism, Stoicism, Cynicism, etc.) that have influenced or even presaged later scientific psychological theories. If we extend that criterion to what we see at Göbekli Tepe, it seems hard to make a case that something similar is present.

Though Göbekli Tepe does feature protowritings, is there anything in our present understanding of these writings that represents a rudimentary school of philosophy or psychology? Speculation points to religious storytelling (Henley, 2018) or representations of social identities and ideologies (Benz & Bauer, 2014); but how does this impact psychological schools of thought when they emerge much later in time? At present at least, it seems Göbekli Tepe is telling us something much more clearly about the evolution of the mind, rather than the history of psychology.

Attempts to include the evolution of the mind within the history of psychology are not necessarily ill advised. The history of human emotions may provide an example. It is no

surprise that psychology is intimately tied to the study of emotionality and thus includes a substantial interest in the origins and development of emotions. However, the study of emotions is often included within the history of psychology due to its ties to relevant schools of thought. The Stoics, for example, pitted reason and duty against emotions as the guiding force of human action. In other words, Stoic philosophy rejected the notion that knowledge ought to be overruled by emotions such as fear or love (Coplan, 2010), whereas the Romantics argued more or less the opposite, believing that emotion, more than reason, would lead to more cooperative, enlightened societies.

Debates regarding the role of emotions in understanding human nature played a significant role in various schools of philosophical thought that have undoubtedly impacted the modern form of psychology. However, do we see something analogous at Göbekli Tepe? Presently, it is hard to tell. The protowritings and carvings at Göbekli Tepe are not easily interpreted and currently there is no consensus regarding what they mean. Do the protowritings and carvings reveal that the residents had some culturally overarching understanding of human nature, something that we might recognize as Romantic, Stoic, or Epicurean, for example? Until we can answer that, where Göbekli Tepe fits in the history of psychology will be obscure.

Evolutionary psychology, on the other hand, aims to understand human behavior as the product of evolved psychological mechanisms which conferred increased fitness (Confer et al., 2010). Göbekli Tepe may very well represent the presence of newly emergent adaptive psychological mechanisms that allowed the transition to a more settled, stratified, and religiously dogmatic society. Understanding the causal forces behind such a major shift would appear to require the tools of evolutionary psychology.

Göbekli Tepe stands as an exciting and important site for psychologists, anthropologists, and archaeologists alike, and it poses many questions that are important to our understanding of cognitively modern humans. We would suggest, however, that at this very immature stage in our understanding, the area of psychology best suited to unravel what Göbekli Tepe means for psychology is evolutionary psychology. Once evolutionary psychology has better fleshed out where Göbekli Tepe fits in hominin evolution, there may be a place for it in the history of psychology. But we are not convinced that we are there yet.

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