

SYMPAB - (16025) - MEASURING ACCEPTANCE OF EVOLUTION IN EUROPE: FOCUS ON EVOLUTIONARY EPISTEMOLOGY

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Short Abstract

Most research in evolution education has been conducted in the USA, where rejection of evolution is more common than in Europe. In the rather secular European populations, common measures of evolution acceptance that focus on biological evolution of physical traits may lead to ceiling effects. One approach to still be able to investigate potential differences in evolution acceptance in Europe is to focus on acceptance of evolutionary epistemology. This philosophical position that entails the evolution of cognitive mechanisms in humans may be hard to accept even for people that accept the biological evolution. To investigate the hypothesis that evolutionary epistemology is less accepted than biological evolution, even for more secular populations, we applied a questionnaire and distributed it to freshmen university students in biology-related study fields across 17 European countries (N = 5,233). Results showed a two-dimensional structure reflecting acceptance of biological evolution and evolutionary epistemology. In every country, biological evolution compared with evolutionary epistemology was more accepted. Country affiliation had a medium effect on acceptance of both biological evolution and evolutionary epistemology. Findings indicate that acceptance of evolution does not necessarily include the acceptance of the biological origin of human behavior and mind. This might be due to the fact that evolutionary epistemology contradicts widespread philosophical intuitions.

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