
Blumenbach: Teleology and the Laws of Vital Organization

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Abstract

The Organism Problem between Life Sciences and Philosophy of Nature around 1800 (Duchesneau, Gambarotto, Illetterati)
Blumenbach's physiology and natural history are grounded on a complex theory of vital forces. These forces correspond to a hierarchy of dynamic principles that include the *Bildungstrieb* as the proper sufficient reason for sequences of epigenetic processes. From an epistemic viewpoint, these dynamic principles are presumed to stand for the concealed causes of constant and regular physiological effects. But in light of Blumenbach's methodology would not such a system of specific forces point to the project of formulating laws of vital organization that would be ultimately irreducible to physical and chemical laws? Presuming that such is the case, what kind of constitutive or regulative use of teleology was supposed to fit into the formulation and justification of those laws? Assessing the methodological and epistemic profile of Blumenbachian physiology might throw some light on the experimental pattern of *Entwicklungsgeschichte* that became a prominent feature of early 19th century German biology.

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