

# Review of: "[Commentary] Biology as a postmodern science: Universals, historicity, and context"

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The article makes some interesting observations on the particularity of biology compared to the hard sciences. However, an exceptionality is even deduced from this particularity: biology would be a postmodern science, i.e. knowledge where truth is relative because it is linked to context and historical change.

This assertion presents problems. Firstly, because the notion of 'postmodern' (PM) is used in a generic way. It is hardly legitimate to identify PM with relativism. There are various positions of epistemological relativism, but these concern all sciences, not just biology. Furthermore, relativism can be understood as fallibilism: if objective knowledge cannot be achieved, it is however possible to integrate and refine partial and discordant knowledge. On the other hand, if there is a characteristic of PM, it lies in the rejection of the very idea of objectivity and the equating of science to a description like any other (one no longer believes in 'grand narratives', i.e. everything is a storytelling and everyone decides what to believe). The article then states that biology should be treated 'as a technological endeavour, as a construct, rather than as a science'. Assuming that it is possible to distinguish today between science and technology, it is from the time of Francis Bacon that the principle "Natura non nisi parendo vincitur ; Naturae non imperatur nisi parendo" (F. Bacon, *Novum Organum*, I, 3, 129) is recognised. Nature is commanded by obeying it: I can act on nature if I know its mechanisms. If I can act on living bodies, it is because I know how they work. The article uses furthermore the theme of finalism as self-evident, whereas it is a very controversial theme in the philosophy of biology.

In summary: while it is true that biology has a special epistemological status, it is highly doubtful that one can explain this status exacton the basis of a theory (PM) that denies the very idea of objectivity. It would also be appropriate to add at least a minimum bibliography, with an indication of up-to-date texts on the epistemological debate concerning biology (including the subject of finalism).