

Review of: "Femmes finales: natural selection, physiology, and the return of the repressed"

Andre Ariew¹

¹ University of Missouri - Columbia

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting article. I have a few suggestions that might improve the article.

The first suggestion is stylistic. For my taste, the paper strings along too many quotes without enough introduction and interpretation. On several occasions I wondered why are we asked to look at a passage? I am not sure how many of them support the theses.

Professor Haig promises to consider two issues, one concerns female metaphors used by 19th century biologists for describing or evaluating teleology. The thesis here is that the change in metaphors (although still feminine) correlates with change in attitudes towards teleological reasoning. I did not find conclusive support for this thesis. In fact, I didn't find sufficient discussion in the body of the text. In the second half of the paper, the female metaphors dropped out of the ensuing discussion. I'm also not sure what the overall significance of the purported (and under-supported) thesis is: what does the change in female metaphors tell us about changing attitudes among biologists? Is there a cause/effect relation? Is there some deeper insight into the working (and thinking) about teleology? I think attention to these issues would improve the essay.

The second issue Haig promises to address in the essay is the reason why biologists rejected teleological reasoning. Haig argues that, contrary to popular opinion, Darwin's naturalized biology is not the most important reason for teleology's demise. Rather, it was the introduction of physiology to the Modern Synthesis. The first thing to note is that the two theses/issues of the paper, one on female metaphors, the other on physiology, appear to be completely distinct. I do not see a connection between them. The paper reads as if there are two separate essays. Perhaps Professor Haig ought to tell us a little more about the connection? The second problem is that, like the first issue on female metaphors, I do not find sufficient evidence for the claim. Perhaps Professor Haig could clarify how out of the survey of biologists covered the thesis is made plain? I would have liked to see the thesis about the introduction of physiology and its effect on the posterity of teleology better developed in the essay.

Professor Haig tells us that rather than eliminating teleology from biology, Darwin naturalized it. I am not sure what the substantive difference is. If Darwin was able to provide a naturalistic grounding for every teleological explanation, then why is that not effectively the same as eliminating it (or at least explaining it away?).

André Ariew

