

# Naturalising purpose: From comparative anatomy to the ' adventures of reason'

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## Abstract

Kant's analysis of the concept of natural purpose in the Critique of judgment captured several features of organisms that he argued warranted making them the objects of a special field of study, in need of a special regulative teleological principle. By showing that organisms have to be conceived as self-organizing wholes, epigenetically built according to the idea of a whole that we must presuppose, Kant accounted for three features of organisms conflated in the biological sciences of the period: adaptation, functionality and conservation of forms..Kant's unitary concept of natural purpose was subsequently split in two directions: first by Cuvier's comparative anatomy, that would draw on the idea of adaptative functions as a regulative principle for understanding in reconstituting and classifying organisms; and then by Goethe's and Geoffroy's morphology, a science of the general transformations of living forms. However, such general transformations in nature, objects of an alleged ' archaeology of nature' , were thought impossible by Kant in the § 80 of the Critique of judgment. Goethe made this ' adventure of reason' possible by changing the sense of ' explanation' : scientific explanation was shifted from the investigation of the mechanical processes of generation of individual organisms to the unveiling of some ideal transformations of types instantiated by those organisms.

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