

Teleology as a methodological principle

Nicole Perret

ENS Paris

Teleology as a form of causality seems to provide a deep comprehension of some specific dynamics of the living. Indeed, teleology stresses the role of the parts not only as included in a system, but as acting *for* the maintenance of a condition of this system. From this logic derive many relevant concepts to apprehend living systems : functions, norms, circularity, self-maintenance etc... Nevertheless, this causal form raises a metaphysical problem because it seems to introduce some project in nature. This is in contrast with the naturalistic vocation of life sciences. That is why, the main project, in the contemporary debate on teleology, is to restore efficient causation. A philosophical tradition, taking inspiration from Kant, tends to see in organization the good theoretical frame to take in account teleology. This project, yet very far from its original inspirations, generally takes the way of reducing teleology to a concatenate series of efficient causation inside a special form of circularity. Now, we argue, even would this not be impossible, the conditions to realize this project imply regrettable consequences. The losses in terms of conceptual richness provided by teleology are very important. These models always requires to be very abstracts, minimal and outside time. Here we claim, this project ascribes too importance to a rigid model of efficient causation coming from a deductive-nomological model of explanation. If we look at the physic of the XX century, the priority of this rigid form of causation is no longer arguable. Indeed, we claim that efficient causation is one of the causal possible principle in science, but not the only one. By showing the role of causation as a principle in general, and therefore also of causation in physics, we ascribe the status of a specific principle to teleology. In contrast to the Kantian prohibition, here we claim a constitutive and objective teleological principle is possible for biology, as well as it is for efficient causation in physic.