



Evolutionary Biology in Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825–1921)

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In her inquiry “pertaining to the normal powers and functions of Woman,” Antoinette Brown Blackwell investigated “every grade of life” comparing masculine and feminine traits according to “unlike but strictly measurable terms.” She came to a central thesis in her essays in *The Sexes Throughout Nature*: that all nature is in balance with true equivalents. She concluded that all beings are “true equivalents” but not “identicals.” Blackwell proved her thesis by experimenting without using the theory of evolution, for the “leopard and the leopardess either are or are not mathematical equivalents,” and so estimated fairly their “powers and capacities, physical and psychical.” Blackwell charted this investigation. In so doing, she arrived at her thesis of equivalent but not identical, that counters Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin’s conclusions, for in their theory the male is superior and representative, the female a modification leaving a “want of balance” or equivalence in that the male is added to and the female subtracted from. Her evolutionary theory is that “Differentiation” occurs in every species “just in proportion to their general development,” every species evolving in parallel but diverging lines. Developments being corresponding, in insects, birds, fish, and mammals, duties are also corresponding, “a balance of activities” in expenditure and functions. The structures of living organisms are “designed for continual change, and possibly for continual improvement.” At the head of the ascending series,” men, and women are unlike physiologically and psychologically.” The brain thinks but “much is determined by the kind and quality of the nerve-system” which as well differs and which was ignored by prior evolution theorists. Nevertheless, such is an excellence which “nature has seen fit to evolve.” The universe and all that is within it is in process, evolutionary process, and all species of living beings correlative and in balance.

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