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# Why does philosophy tell stories?

### The Author

**Thierry Hoquet** is a philosopher and a senior lecturer at the Paris Ouest Nanterre la Défense University. His research focuses on different aspects of life sciences, from the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day, including an analysis of their connection to ethics or to science fiction.

He has published several works on XVIII<sup>th</sup> century naturalists Buffon and Linné, and has directed a special number of the *Critique* magazine dedicated to mutants (n° 709-710, June-July 2006). He has codirected with Elsa Dorlin a study focusing on the concept of "sex" in biomedical sciences in the XX<sup>th</sup> century. Currently, his main research themes are the works of Darwin, cyborgs and virility.

### Bibliography

***Cyborg philosophie : Penser contre les dualismes [Cyborg Philosophy: An Anti-Dualist Thought]*** (Seuil, 2011)

***Darwin contre Darwin : comment lire l'Origine des espèces ? [Darwin vs. Darwin: How to Interpret The Origin of Species?]*** (Seuil, 2009)

***La Virilité. À quoi rêvent les hommes ? [Virility: What do men dream of?]*** (Larousse, 2009)

***Buffon/Linné : éternels rivaux de la biologie? [Buffon/Linné: Biology's Eternal Rivals?]*** (Dunod, 2007)

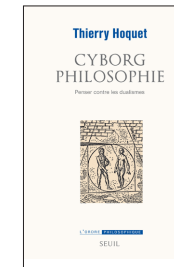
***Buffon illustré : Les gravures de l'Histoire naturelle (1749-1767) [The Illustrated Buffon: An Analysis of The Etchings in The Natural History]*** (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 2007)

***Buffon, histoire naturelle et philosophie [Buffon, Natural History and Philosophy]*** (Honoré Champion, 2005)

***La Vie, anthologie [Life, an Anthology]*** (Flammarion, 1999)

### Zoom

***Cyborg philosophie : Penser contre les dualismes [Cyborg Philosophy: An Anti-Dualist Thought]*** (Seuil, 2011)



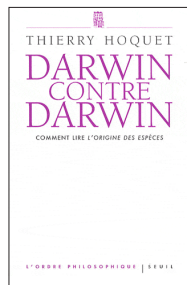
Whether it is through cinema (*Robocop*, *Terminator*) or manga, Cyborg haunts contemporary culture.

He finds his embodiment in the figure of the doped athlete, in medical prosthesis and in fantasies of an "enhanced", even immortal, humankind. But Cyborg is also, and above all, a philosophical concept. This hybrid between living organism and machine disrupts some of the fundamental dichotomies of our thought:

nature vs. artifice, human vs. non-human, nature vs. culture, masculin vs. féminin, normal vs. pathological etc. Based on a personal interpretation of the works of Georges Canguilhem and Donna Haraway, Thierry Hoquet's formally and stylistically extremely original text explores the enigmas of this icon. Could Cyborg be the means to achieve a dualism-free humanity, Platonic dove dreaming of its unburdened flight in airless skies? Or, on the contrary, is he the symbol of our submissiveness to a technological system of control and oppression, the clicking sounds of steel mechanisms nothing but an indication of humanity's slow decline? Analysing Cyborg from a philosophical point of view means establishing the links between living organisms and machine and considering the possibility of their fusion.

But Cyborg also incites to a reevaluation of gender differences and of their connection to nature and technology. Is Cyborg the neuter or the androgyny, or does he suggest the possibility of a new way of interpreting masculinity and femininity? One thing is obvious: in describing the human condition and its indissoluble contradictions, Cyborg challenges philosophy.

**Darwin contre Darwin : comment lire L'Origine des espèces ? [Darwin vs. Darwin: How to Interpret *The Origin of Species*?]** (Seuil, 2009)



In his famous work, *The Origin of Species*, Darwin is not solely interested in determining the existence of natural selection: he also carries a reflection on the fluctuations of this process, the causes that produce them and the laws that do or do not allow these changes to be transmitted to

descendants.

This idea of the tension between variation and selection, present in his work since 1859, significantly influenced the manner in which *The Origin* was interpreted. It legitimized several Darwinian or Anti-Darwinian theories, to the point where it gave rise to paradoxical claims: some even stated that the fundamental issue is defining these laws of variation, believing that they could declare themselves Darwinians while rejecting the essential concept of "natural selection"...

The translation quarrels and the ambiguities provided by Darwin's own amendments to his work in later editions only aggravated these tensions. The analysis of these points of view shows that Darwinians and Non-Darwinians make up a much nuanced pallet of opinions, but in the end they all find themselves in a similar position: in order to defend their beliefs, they all play Darwin against Darwin.

**La Virilité. À quoi rêvent les hommes ? [Virility: What do men dream of?]** (Larousse, 2009)



What do men dream of? Strength, courage, competitive spirit... A hero's virtue... A magic weapon... What is virility? Is it an exclusively masculine quality? How does it express itself, how is it represented, what are its codes? Can it be earned and if so, how? And can

philosophy take any interest in it? Written in an alert style, avoiding all conventional themes, this innovative essay explores the human body, reveals its behavioral patterns, its manner of display, and examines masculinity's contemporary crisis.

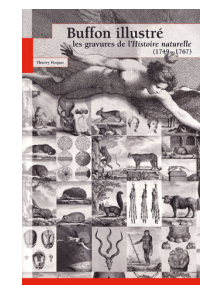
**Buffon/Linné : éternels rivaux de la biologie? [Buffon/Linné: Biology's Eternal Rivals?]** (Dunod, 2007)



In mid-XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, both the French Buffon and the Swede Linné have tried, each in his own way, to find a method for categorizing the abundance of living species. Tremendous undertaking that has resulted in two very different classifications. Linné's nomenclature, used to describe about 8.000

species in his *Species Plantarum*, remains a work of reference. As for Buffon, he started developing an evolutionary theory in his *Natural History, General and Particular*. These two very distinct personalities each found a particular way of practicing science, and both put forward two unique worldviews. They have always confronted each other, without ever meeting. This book explains each one's contribution to the evolution of ideas and allows us to understand that the way to further science is from controversy to discovery.

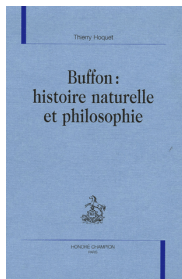
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The purpose of this work is, as is its structure, twofold: it aims to explain, but also to document. It analyses the relation between the scientific work of Buffon and his illustrations. The first half is a historical and epistemological study presenting the main characteristics and outlining

the great harmony between the elements of this body of work. It is a comparison to other documents, some illustrated (Ruysch or Perrault) and some, on the contrary, deprived of images (Linné). Thus obtaining the necessary understanding of the visual representations in order to get a better reading of *Natural History*, we may be surprised to discover the profound cohesion of this work, including that of the contributions from several authors: Buffon of course, Daubenton, obviously, but also De Sève. The second half presents a unique iconographic corpus, making available to the reader the complete collection of plates illustrating the first series of *Natural History, General and Particular* (editio princeps, 1749-1767, fifteen volumes 4to). Here the intent is to encourage further research on *Natural History* by rendering the images accessible, in the hope that this corpus, all-comprehensive but limited to the first fifteen volumes, now available in a single innovative volume, will inspire further analysis.

**Buffon, histoire naturelle et philosophie**  
**[Buffon, Natural History and Philosophy]**  
(Honoré Champion, 2005)



To Buffon, natural history is a philosophy, in the classical sense of the term: it is the complete body of work on natural sciences.

His main publication, *The Natural History* (1749-1788), can be considered a collection or an assemblage of accounts given by

travellers; but if this work speaks of the earth or of animals, it is with the purpose of elaborating, based on this material, a more general system. Thus, Buffon's project finds its origins in physics, a discipline itself founded on a new method, to which, emulating Descartes, he associates "three stage of doubt".

In the work of this natural scientist, the philosophical system in its entirety is rethought and profoundly transformed, as he questions the conventional role of ethics and metaphysics. By doing so, Buffon escapes the image of a literary hack, a vulgar and mundane popularizer, to appear as both erudite and a worthy philosopher: it is this figure that we have chosen to analyze.