Darwinian Medicine: The Past and Present State of Medicine’s Unifying Science

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Abstract
In the 1990s, Randolph Nesse and George Williams called for the application of evolutionary principles to medical problems through the science of Darwinian medicine. Although they defined Darwinian medicine and articulated its importance, its history can be traced back to Erasmus and Charles Darwin. After the formulation of Evolution by Natural Selection, medicine was slow to adopt an evolutionary perspective, with a few notable exceptions during the Twentieth Century. Nesse and Williams’ work enhanced interest in this area, but as a field, evolutionary medicine has yet to mature. Historical legacies from Aristotelian teleology and Hippocratic Medicine may have served as a barrier to its development. This review discusses these putative historical barriers, summarizes important landmarks in the history of Darwinian medicine, and provides a viewpoint on its importance for modern medicine.

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