

Abstract



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Towards a post-mechanistic view on life

- The life sciences have been diagnosed and criticized for their dominant reductionist mechanistic view on life: a perspective that treats life forms primarily as parts-based, isolatable individuals that are clearly distinguishable from dead matter. However, in current attempts in the life sciences to understand and modify life forms, life is constantly empirically revealing itself, confronting engineers with how it differs from the man-made mechanical machines that life forms are modeled after. In actively working with life forms in the intimate setting of the laboratory, life forms invite engineers to allow for what I identify as a post-mechanistic view on life, seeing living matter as more processual, collaborative, cognitive and seeing life versus non-life on a more gradual scale. In this presentation I thus ask: How do life sciences support a post-mechanistic view on life? I will draw observations about the view on life by connecting the dominant view in the life sciences, different post-mechanistic metaphysical stances in philosophy of biology, and scientific practices in current synthetic biology. I will end by asking how this support for a post-mechanistic view on life should be understood, in terms of organology or new materialism? Both visions embrace a non-dualistic view on living matter, including technological matter into their conception of matter, but differ in the way they conceive of the entanglement of matter.



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