



LECTURE

Between Teleology and Mechanism: The History of the Concept of Organism from a Philosophical Perspective

Co-sponsored by the Department of History

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The concept of organism is fundamental to biology. After a decades-long neglect of its importance in the shadow of molecular biology, developments in ontogenetic, evolutionary, and cognitive research have brought the concept of organism back to the center of scientific and philosophical attention.

'Organism' in the western intellectual tradition can be traced back to pre-Socratic philosophy and has evolved in concert with ideas about the nature of social organization. Dr. Koutroufinis will trace the correlations between transitions in social organization and changes in organismic theory as they have developed historically. He will outline the evolution of organismic theory from ancient times up to the 21st century, focusing on the tension between two antagonistic concepts – teleology and mechanism.

This lecture will examine how this tension influenced revolutionary changes in biology in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and how the development of the concept of entropy, and in 20th century, 'maximum entropy production,' has shaped current biological thought.

DATE AND TIME: Thursday, March 7, 1:30 - 2:45

LOCATION: Summit Room, University Union (3rd fl.)