

Levels of human-mindbrain and levels of neuroscience discourse: Partial de-coupling or tight inter-level causation?

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My contribution today will reflect a dual interest in philosophy of nature - including humans' place in nature - and in science studies and the discourses related to the institutions of science. Coming from biology and moving towards a non-reductionist understanding of the biology of human beings, I will try to locate the claims of the new neurosciences (on the neuronal grounding of behavioural, social and cognitive phenomena in human animals) within an emergentist perspective of levels of organization, rooted both in the natural evolution of species, our species included, and in the cultural development of human civilization, and the intercoupled levels of cultural, social, and societally embedded phenomena of human forms of life. This ontological part of the talk is thus a proposal for an updated philosophy of human nature.

Furthermore, I will try to locate the discourse on the 'clash' between reductionism and non-reductionist positions of the human sciences as a phenomenon that is not first and foremost about basic science but about how progress here (coming slowly or as 'breakthroughs') gets communicated or branded in ways that are new as compared to more traditional stories of paradigmatic breakthroughs of academic science. This part of the talk will motivate a more institutional analysis of the hopes and expectations connected to upcoming cross-disciplinary scientific fields, and try to discern whether this discourse is partly de-coupled to real progress (or the lack of progress) on a more basic level of scientific knowledge production. The tenet here is that if science studies should contribute to understand neuroscientific breakthroughs, the gross level of institutional shifts of funding and managing science must be taken into account.