
The substantive and methodological integration of biology, anthropology, and philosophy in Plessner's *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*

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Abstract

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Plessner's *Die Stufen* (1928) offers a sweeping, systematic philosophical account of the place of human beings in the natural world – or, as Plessner put it, a "philosophical anthropology" set in the context of a new "philosophy of nature." The central theoretical innovation of Plessner's work is the concept of *Positionalität*, which highlights major structural differences between species-typical forms of organism-environment interaction, and leads Plessner to conclude that human beings' relation to their environments is distinctively characterized by the species-typicality (for humans) of *mediation* of their organism-environment interaction by non-species-typical artifactual conditions (*nat'urlichen K'unstlichkeit*), and their associated capacity to take an extra-bodily perceptual standpoint (*Exzentrizität*). (For review, see Grene 1974a, 1974b, Fischer 2009, and Honenberger 2012.)

Here I review Plessner's detailed engagement, in *Die Stufen*, with the biological literature of his day – particularly Darwin, Jakob von Uexk'ull, and Hans Driesch. On the basis of this review, I identify two types of interdisciplinary integration characteristic of Plessner's procedure that (I argue) offer lessons for contemporary inquiries situated at the border of biology, anthropology, and philosophy. The first integration is methodological, regarding the co-operation of biology, anthropology, and philosophy in the theoretical approach to objects of common concern to each. (In Plessner's account, these objects prominently include nature itself, organic life, plants, non-human animals, and human beings, as well as adaptation, nutrition, memory, and similar features.) The second integration is substantive, involving substantive claims about the constitution, distinction, and relation of a number of these objects of common concern.

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