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EINLADUNG ZUM KOLLOQUIUM

Jesse M. Mulder

(Utrecht)

Unity Without Reductionism: A Progression

Festkolloquium zur Verleihung des Kurt Gödel Preises 2019

One of the core tenets of reductionism is the deal of unity, of a unified, comprehensive understanding of reality. And although it is in principle not necessary to do so by choosing physics as one's fundament, it is a natural choice: everything we can study empirically is made of, or otherwise involves, physical stuff, physical happenings, or physical forces. From this physicalist-reductionist perspective, claiming that one or the other phenomenon cannot be reduced (in some informative sense) to the physical level amounts to giving up on the ideal of unity: it leaves us with unsatisfactory forms of dualism or pluralism. I will argue that the reductionist is right: unity is ultimately crucial. The error of the reductionist lies not in her commitment to unity, but rather in her assumption that this requires singling out one level – paradigmatically the physical – as the only metaphysically fundamental one. And so we can say that the pluralist, too, is right: the variety of natural phenomena, reflected in a variety of scientific disciplines, is best understood as a metaphysically genuine plurality. The error of the pluralist lies not in her recognition of this plurality, but rather in her assumption that this requires rejecting the ideal of unity. I conclude by sketching a synthesis of unity and pluralism: unity without reductionism.

Jesse M. Mulder obtained his PhD in philosophy cum laude from Utrecht University in 2014. His dissertation, entitled *Conceptual Realism: on the structure of metaphysical thought*, sketches a broadly Aristotelian, anti-reductionist version of conceptual realism, and covers topics like individuation, time, modality, causality, and life from that perspective. Subsequently, he worked as a postdoctoral researcher at Utrecht's computer science department, in the context of Prof. Dr. Jan Broersen's ERC-funded project "Responsible Intelligent Systems". Here his research focused on collective action, and on the nature of AI. Since 2016, he is assistant professor at Utrecht's Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. His philosophical interests continue to include metaphysics, philosophy of logic, philosophy of biology, philosophy of mind, and action theory. How these various fields hang together is the topic of his current individual research project, funded by the Dutch national funding agency NWO, entitled *Unifying Metaphysical Pluralism* (December 2017 - August 2021).

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