

What is an organism?

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Abstract

The question 'What is an organism?', formerly considered as essential in biology, has now been increasingly replaced by a larger question, 'What is a biological individual?'. On the grounds that i) individuation is theory-dependent, and ii) physiology does not offer a theory, biologists and philosophers of biology have claimed that it is the theory of evolution by natural selection which tells us what counts as a biological individual. Here I show that one physiological field, immunology, offers a theory, which makes possible a physiological theory of individuation. I give a new answer to the question 'What is an organism?', and try to link together the evolutionary and immunological individuations.

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