

Refining the mosaic unity

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The idea of mosaic unity is an alternative to the old Putnam-Oppenheim picture of the unity of science, which is based on global “levels” linked by bridge laws. Instead, different fields are seen as parts of a mechanistic research programme and their targets as related to each other according to levels of mechanisms. The crucial thing is that levels of mechanism, the level of the functionally defined whole and the level of its component parts, are local and partly dependent on our explanatory interests. The way in which knowledge from different disciplines is related thus depends on what it means to be a mechanism of a given kind. The mosaic unity –thesis has been mainly developed in the context of the life sciences, but the inclusion of the social sciences is an attractive option given the importance of the concept of social mechanism. But there are differences in the very concept of mechanism used in these different domains. This paper explores the implications of these differences to the way in which knowledge from different disciplines is to be related by drawing from examples of the use of mechanism-concepts in the neurosciences and the social sciences.