
Reflective Interdisciplinarity in Practice: Integrating Biology and Philosophy in Studies of Individualization

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Interdisciplinary research is widely regarded as essential for addressing complex scientific and societal challenges, yet it takes many different forms. In this talk, we examine a distinctive type – reflective interdisciplinarity – through a case study of collaboration between philosophers and biologists studying individualization. In reflective interdisciplinarity, one discipline (here, philosophy of science) reflects on and contributes to another (biology), rather than simply combining insights from multiple fields. To analyze this form of collaboration, we introduce a framework that distinguishes four dimensions of interdisciplinarity: research objects, research activities, communication, and the personal and institutional conditions that shape interdisciplinary work. The case study shows that reflective interdisciplinarity can involve deeply integrated, collaborative inquiry in which philosophers and biologists jointly develop research questions, concepts, and integrate findings. We describe this process as inquiry-embedded integration, emphasizing that new knowledge emerges through sustained collaborative reasoning and shared epistemic commitments. Finally, we argue that communication practices and institutional settings are not merely enabling conditions but actively shape interdisciplinary research and its outcomes.

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