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NIELS BOHR'S CONCEPTION OF LIFE

Summary

In the course of his lectures given in Como in 1927 Niels Bohr introduces a very important concept of complementarity. Two years later he publishes his first view of biological questions, which he includes in one series of lectures devoted to quantum mechanics and complementarity.

In one of his later articles in the same series, explaining why he started publishing his opinions on biology, he states that this may help understand his interpretation of physics, and especially the category of complementarity. He can see a possibility of using the category of complementarity also outside physics. He hopes that epistemological implications of his category of complementarity can broaden the spectrum of recipients when they will refer to well-known problems, especially in the sphere of biology.

Bohr directs his attention to biology hoping to shed new light on the old problem concerning the understanding of the concept of life. He has no doubts that the 'epistemological lesson' of quantum mechanics, by drawing attention to the observation conditions in biology, may be helpful in overcoming the controversy between "vitalism" and "mechanicism". He rejects the vitalistic doctrine with its "vital force" or "entelechy", as devoid of scientific valor. He also formulates arguments against "mechanicism".

Bohr developed his biological interests directed to philosophy to the end of his life. His last work was devoted to exactly biological questions. Unfortunately, sudden death stopped him from completing it.

Because of the fact that in some places Bohr presented his views on biology in an obscure way, some biologists included him in the circle of supporters of vitalism. A more profound analysis of his views proves that this opinion is groundless.

Translated by Tadeusz Karłowicz

Słowa kluczowe: witalizm, mechanicyzm, komplementarność, „Argumentem Metaboliczny”. „Zasada Tanatologiczna”

Key words: vitalism, mechanicism, complementarity, “Metabolic Argument”, “Tanathological Principle”.

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