

Light and Life: Interactions between Physics and Biology, 1900–1950, Part I

Monday, August 7, 2023 11:40 AM (25 minutes)

These two papers present a joint argument exploring how scientists with expertise in physics and/or biology ventured beyond the boundaries of their fields. Our primary focus is on research surrounding a debated question during the first half of the twentieth century: the impact of light on living organisms. Notable figures such as Selig Hecht, Otto Warburg, Frits Went, James Franck, Eugene Rabinowitch, and, of course, Niels Bohr are included as examples. The analysis aims to examine the nature of these interdisciplinary encounters and provide tentative explanations for their varying degrees of success. The claim made is that significant factors contributing to the outcomes included, firstly, the successful translation of phenomena into resolvable “problems”; secondly, the resonance of these problems with shared or positively interdependent goals of all participants; and thirdly, the recognition that achieving these goals necessitated the combination of resources and expertise from both fields.

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