

## Adolf Portmann: A Thinker of Self-Expressive Life

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**Abstract :** The Swiss scholar Adolf Portmann (1897-1982) was an outstanding figure in the history of biology and the philosophy of the life sciences. Portmann's biological theory is primarily focused on the problem of animal form (Gestalt), and it poses a significant counterpart to neo-Darwinian theories about the explanatory primacy of a genetic level over the outer appearance of animals. Besides that, Portmann's morphological studies related to species-specific ontogeny and the influence of environmental surroundings can be classified as the antecedents of contemporary synthetic approaches such as "eco-evo-devo", "extended synthesis or biosemiotics. The most influential of Portmann's concepts up to the present is his thesis of a social womb (Soziale Mutterschos): human children are born physiologically premature in comparison with other primates, and they find a second womb in a social environment nurturing their healthy development. It is during the first year of extra-uterine life when a specific human nature is formed, characterized by the strong tie between an individual and a broader historical, cultural whole. In my paper, I will closely analyze: a) the historical coordinates of Portmann's philosophy of the life sciences (e.g., the philosophical anthropology of A. Gehlen, H. Plessner, and their concept of humans as beings "open to the world"), b) the relation of Portmann's concept of the social womb to contemporary theories of infant birth evolution.

**Keywords :** adolf portmann, extended synthesis, philosophical anthropology, social womb

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