Path Emergence in Institutional Dynamics

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PREFACE

Institutions shape the rules and norms that govern societies, yet the processes by which they emerge, evolve, and transform are often far from linear. Traditional institutional theories, such as rational choice, historical, and sociological institutionalism, provide valuable insights into the origins and persistence of social institutions. However, these frameworks struggle to fully explain how new institutions arise or how existing ones change unpredictably in response to complex interactions. This book, *Path Emergence in Institutional Dynamics*, explores the phenomenon of institutional emergence through a fresh lens, positioning itself at the intersection of institutional theory and complexity science.

The core premise of this book is that institutions are not static constructs but dynamic, adaptive systems shaped by the continuous interplay of individual actions, social interactions, and structural conditions. Path emergence offers a novel theoretical framework to understand these processes, emphasizing the importance of micro-macro linkages and symbolic communication in institutional change. Unlike deterministic theories such as path dependence, which often depict institutions as locked into fixed trajectories, path emergence captures the fluidity and unpredictability of institutional dynamics. It illustrates how small, localized interactions can generate new orders that ripple across societies, fostering change at both regional and global levels.

This book is divided into two parts. **Part I: Emergentist Approach to Institutional Dynamics** develops the theoretical foundation of path emergence. It begins by outlining the limitations of existing institutional theories and the challenges posed by emergentism, a perspective that highlights the spontaneous formation of patterns from decentralized actions. The first chapter introduces emergentism as a challenge to new institutionalism, questioning the conventional emphasis on structure and historical continuity. Chapter Two expands on this discussion by comparing competing paths in institutional change, exploring concepts such as path dependence, path creation, and path contingency. The third chapter focuses on the logic of path emergence, unpacking key mechanisms like morphogenetic fields, social resonance, self-organized criticality and co-evolution, which together explain how institutions emerge from seemingly chaotic or uncoordinated interactions.

Part II: Path Emergence in Europe and Northeast Asia shifts to real-world case studies, applying the framework of path emergence to institutional developments across specific regions. Chapter Four delves into the Helsinki Process, a diplomatic initiative that significantly influenced Europe's post-Cold War institutional landscape, illustrating how path emergence theory accounts for its unexpected success through organic evolution, multi-level interactions, and symbolic exchanges. Chapter Five examines the transnational dimensions of this process by focusing on network resonance, while Chapter Six explores the complexities of the Korean Peninsula, addressing historical legacies, political shifts, and emerging diplomatic channels. Chapter Seven analyzes the security and human rights nexus in North Korea, highlighting

institutional challenges. Chapter Eight discusses the prospects of institutional multilateralism in Northeast Asia, while Chapter Nine envisions a potential path toward "emergent peace" in the region, emphasizing the need for adaptive cooperation through continuous interaction and feedback.

It is important to note that some chapters originally stem from articles I previously published in academic journals. These articles have been substantially revised and updated for this book, resulting in richer content and deeper insights. However, readers should be aware that some overlap may occur between chapters due to the shared theoretical approach of path emergence.

The chapters and their original sources are as follows:

- Chapter 5: **'Dynamics of Network Resonance: The Case of the Transnational Helsinki Network,'** *Europe-Asia Studies,* Vol. 71, Issue 5, 2019, Routledge.
- Chapter 6: **'Path Emergence on the Korean Peninsula: From Division to Unification,'** *Pacific Focus,* Vol. 27, No. 1, 2012, Wiley-Blackwell.
- Chapter 7: **'The Security and Human Rights Nexus in North Korea: Is Self-Organizing Dynamics Feasible,'** *The Korean Journal of International Studies,* Vol. 19, No. 1, 2021, The Korean Association of International Studies.
- Chapter 8: **'Institutional Multilateralism in Northeast Asia: A Path Emergence Theory Perspective,'** *North Korean Review,* Vol. 48, No. 6, 2015, McFarland.

- Chapter 9: **'A Path to "Emergent Peace" in Northeast Asia: The Shadow of the Past Matters,'** *Asian Studies Review,* Vol. 39, No. 3, 2015, Routledge.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the respective publishers—Routledge, Wiley-Blackwell, The Korean Association of International Studies, McFarland, and Routledge again—for granting permission to reprint and adapt these works. Their support has been invaluable in bringing this book to fruition.

This book offers more than just a critique of conventional institutional theories—it proposes a new way of thinking about institutions as emergent and evolving systems. Path emergence theory challenges deterministic assumptions by introducing concepts drawn from complexity science, cognitive neuroscience, and evolutionary theory. These interdisciplinary insights highlight how institutions are born out of symbolic communication, social resonance, and co-evolutionary dynamics between individuals and the structures they inhabit. The framework recognizes that institutional change is not merely the outcome of deliberate planning or historical inertia but a continuous process shaped by both intended actions and unintended consequences.

Path Emergence in Institutional Dynamics also engages with pressing contemporary issues. In a world marked by rapid technological change, geopolitical uncertainty, and environmental crises, understanding how institutions adapt—or fail to adapt—has never been more urgent. Institutions that respond flexibly to emergent challenges are more likely to

thrive, while those locked into rigid paths may risk collapse. By drawing on empirical examples from Europe and Northeast Asia, this book demonstrates the value of path emergence theory in both explaining the past and imagining alternative futures.

This book aims to contribute to the ongoing conversations about institutional dynamics across disciplines, including political science, sociology, economics, and international relations. It offers policymakers and scholars alike a framework to understand institutional change in an interconnected, complex world. The insights presented here underscore that institutions are not just products of historical legacies or strategic choices but are continuously evolving systems shaped by emergent processes.

I hope that *Path Emergence in Institutional Dynamics* will inspire further research and dialogue on the transformative power of path emergence. By illuminating how institutions arise and adapt through dynamic interactions, this book invites readers to rethink not only the nature of institutional change but also the possibilities for building more resilient and cooperative social orders in the future.

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PART I

EMERGENTIST APPROACH TO INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS

CHAPTER 1

EMERGENTISM AS A CHALLENGE TO NEW INSTITUTIONALISM

Introduction

Social institutions, viewed as dynamic entities, have become a focal point for social scientists, sparking significant interest in "new institutionalism." This field comprises four main theoretical branches: rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and, more recently, discursive institutionalism. The diversity within new institutionalism has fueled extensive theoretical debates on issues such as the distinctions between formal and informal institutions, the processes of institutional creation, continuity, and change, as well as the interplay between structure and agency and the concept of power.

Despite a shared acknowledgment of social institutions as pivotal explanatory variables in socio-political dynamics, these various strands of new institutionalism employ different analytical frameworks, leading to distinct approaches in institutional analysis. Insights from new institutionalism provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in institutional dynamics. However, one area that remains underexplored is the mechanism by which emergent properties arise in the

relationship between micro-level individual actions and macro-level social structures.

This chapter aims to enhance our understanding of institutional dynamics through the lens of emergentism. Emergentism represents a new wave of systems theory designed to elucidate complex social phenomena. Its fundamental premise is that social emergence is more likely to occur in social systems characterized by several features: (i) numerous components that interact within densely connected social networks; (ii) global system functions that cannot be attributed to any single subset of components but are instead distributed across the entire system; (iii) the overall system's inability to be meaningfully decomposed into subsystems; and (iv) the components' interactions utilizing a complex and sophisticated form of communication.[1]

Emergentism aligns well with the objective of articulating the logic of "path emergence," a new concept proposed in this work to explain the emergent processes linking micro and macro levels in institutional dynamics. To achieve this, the chapter will first provide a brief overview of the evolution of emergentism, then explore various emergentist approaches to understanding the micro-macro link, and finally review the competing branches of new institutionalism through an emergentist lens.

Evolution of Emergentism

The concept of emergence and emergent properties has been applied across various fields, including philosophy, biology, physics, and the

[1] R. Keith Sawyer, *Social Emergence: Societies as Complex Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23.

philosophy of mind. Emergent properties are characteristics of a system that arise from the interactions and relationships among its components but are not directly predictable from the properties of those components in isolation. These properties often exhibit novel or unexpected qualities that cannot be derived from a simple summation of the individual parts. For instance, in the philosophy of mind, emergentism suggests that mental phenomena, such as consciousness, cannot be fully explained by understanding the individual components of the brain alone; instead, consciousness may emerge from the complex interactions of neural processes.

The idea of emergence encourages a holistic perspective in understanding complex systems and emphasizes the importance of studying the interactions and relationships within these systems. It recognizes that there are levels of organization and complexity where new properties and phenomena can emerge, challenging the reductionist approach that seeks to explain everything in terms of its fundamental parts.

The foundational concept of emergent irreducibility—that a whole can sometimes be greater than the sum of its parts—has a long history, traced back to thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. This notion often carried metaphysical implications and was intertwined with interpretations of the "great chain of being" (scala naturae). This hierarchical view of existence structured entities within a pyramid, with more valuable or prestigious beings occupying higher levels. These hierarchies were not only descriptive but also held axiological convictions, assigning greater value to entities at the top of the hierarchy.

Historically, these hierarchical worldviews manifested in various forms, encompassing gods and angels, kings and noblemen, higher life forms, and other elements, all organized in a stratified manner. In such systems, a qualitative distinction existed between entities at different levels, with those higher up regarded as more valuable or closer to an ideal state.

Moreover, the connection between emergent irreducibility and epistemic considerations is evident in the belief systems of religious and philosophical mystics. The ascent toward higher levels of understanding, often viewed as a ladder to be climbed or a path of progress, reflects an archaic form of the epistemic intuition of emergence. Mystics may have perceived the pursuit of knowledge as a journey marked by moments of mysterious illumination, further emphasizing the idea that true knowledge lies at higher levels of understanding.

The fusion of the concept of multiple epistemic levels with the metaphysical pyramid of being—where higher-level wholes are more than the sum of their parts—gained momentum in the early twentieth century, influenced by the rapid progress of modern science. A significant precursor to this fusion was J. S. Mill, who, prompted by the surprises and uncertainties encountered in chemistry, articulated the concept of "heterophatic laws."

Mill's notion of heterophatic laws distinguished itself from straightforward mechanical causal laws. According to Mill, the effects of processes described by heterophatic laws could not be understood merely as the sum of their components' separate effects. This introduced an epistemological

criterion, indicating that the outcomes of these processes could not be deduced a priori from knowledge at the component level.

This criterion allowed for optimism regarding future scientific progress, suggesting that experience and advancements in knowledge might eventually enable the deduction of some heterophatic laws from mechanical ones. In essence, the hope was that future science would uncover ways to understand and predict the outcomes of processes described by heterophatic laws by deriving them from component-level knowledge. This optimistic perspective envisioned a future where heterophatic outcomes could be fully explained and predicted by a more advanced science, making the scientific process more deductive.

The line of thought initiated by J. S. Mill resonated with other empiricist thinkers of the time, such as Alexander Bain and G. H. Lewes. Lewes, a friend of Mill, coined the term "emergent." In *Problems of Life and Mind* (1875), Lewes distinguished between "emergent" and "resultant" effects.[2] According to him, effects are resultant if they can be calculated through the mere addition or subtraction of causes operating together, as in the case of an object's weight, which can be determined by summing the weights of its parts. Conversely, effects are emergent if they cannot be calculated in this manner, as they are qualitatively novel compared to the causes from which they arise.

This empiricist perspective, often described as "contingently epistemological irreducibility," implies that the idea of emergence is

[2] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind* (London: Trübner & Co., 1875).

linked to current knowledge. It acknowledges the limitations of present understanding while leaving open the possibility that, with future advancements, emergent phenomena may become more precisely explicable.

However, the concept of emergence underwent further evolution in the early twentieth century. The initially empirically rooted intuition of emergence, with its contingent epistemological sense, began to fuse with more metaphysical intuitions. This shift marked a broader understanding of emergence that transcended the limitations of current knowledge. The exploration of emergent phenomena started to incorporate not only epistemological openness but also metaphysical aspects, acknowledging the potential for irreducible features within the fabric of reality itself. This evolution illustrates the dynamic nature of philosophical ideas, as concepts like emergence develop and expand over time, integrating insights from various intellectual traditions and adapting to new scientific and philosophical developments.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, a new epistemological-cum-metaphysical concept of emergence gained prominence, particularly in the 1920s. Thinkers such as Samuel Alexander, C. Lloyd Morgan, and Charlie D. Broad played key roles in advancing this idea. This concept proposed a hierarchy of levels of reality, where each stratum manifests new features that are logically irreducible to the lower levels.

The motivation behind many emergentists of this period was partly rooted in a desire to reconcile the emerging Darwinian worldview with older vitalistic, mentalistic, or theistic ideas. Alexander and Morgan, in

particular, speculated about a "pyramid of emergent evolution" that might encompass aspects of the divine. Although there were emergentists worldwide, the 1920s is often referred to as the heyday of British emergentism due to the contributions of thinkers like Alexander, Morgan, and Broad.

In *Space, Time and Deity* (1920), Samuel Alexander formulated a complex metaphysical system subject to various interpretations.[3] He posited that all processes are initially physico-chemical, yet as their complexity escalates, they generate emergent qualities specific to novel intricate configurations. These qualities are governed by unique laws and are addressed by autonomous special sciences that provide elevated explanations for the behavior of complex configurations. Among these emergent qualities are mental attributes, alongside biological and chemical qualities. While Alexander contends that all processes are fundamentally physico-chemical, he asserts that mental processes are synonymous with neural processes, claiming that mental qualities distinctly characterize higher-order configurations.

C. Lloyd Morgan, in *Emergent Evolution* (1923),[4] and subsequently in *Life, Spirit, and Mind* (1926)[5] and *The Emergence of Novelty* (1933),[6] introduced the concept of emergence to the evolutionary process. He argued that throughout evolution, new properties and behaviors, such as life, mind, and reflective thought, emerge unpredictably from existing

[3] Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity* (London: Macmillan, 1920).
[4] C. Lloyd Morgan, *Emergent Evolution* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1923).
[5] C. Lloyd Morgan, *Life, Spirit, and Mind* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1926).
[6] C. Lloyd Morgan, *The Emergence of Noveltyt* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1933).

entities. Drawing inspiration from Mill and Lewes, Morgan identified the paradigmatic instance of emergence in the novel and unpredictable properties resulting from chemical reactions.

These emergent properties, far from being mere epiphenomena, create a "new kind of relatedness" and establish novel lawful connections. Such connections influence the trajectory of lower-level events in ways that would not be achievable in their absence. Consequently, emergent properties exhibit causal autonomy and possess downward causal powers, impacting the course of events at lower levels.

In *The Mind and Its Place in Nature* (1925), Broad framed his investigation as an attempt to address a broader question beyond the Mechanist-Vitalist debate concerning living organisms.[7] Specifically, he sought to answer whether seemingly distinct types of material objects are irreducibly different. His interest extended beyond resolving the Mechanist-Vitalist controversy to exploring whether special sciences can be reduced to more general sciences (e.g., biology to chemistry), ultimately to physics.

Broad identified two possible answers to the reducibility question: mechanism and emergentism. He characterized the purest Mechanist position as positing a singular kind of material governed by one elementary law that governs the behavior of each particle. According to this view, all apparent differences in material types are merely diverse arrangements of the same elementary particle.

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[7] Charlie D. Broad, T*he Mind and Its Place in Nature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1925).

In contrast, the emergentist position advocated by Broad rejects the deep ontological unity proposed by mechanism. While emergentists also adhere to physical substance monism—asserting that "there is only fundamentally one kind of stuff"—they recognize "aggregates [of matter] of various orders," which represent a stratification of substances at different levels. Each level is characterized by irreducible properties that emerge from lower-level properties. There are two types of laws: "intra-ordinal" laws, which relate events within a specific order, and "trans-ordinal" laws, which describe the emergence of higher-level properties from their lower-level counterparts. Emergent properties are identified by the trans-ordinal laws in which they are involved.

Trans-ordinal laws, equivalent to what we now refer to as "emergent laws," are fundamental, irreducible laws that describe the non-causal covariation of an emergent property with its lower-level base. These laws are not metaphysically necessitated by lower-level laws or compositional principles. Broad emphasizes that trans-ordinal laws are scientific; once discovered, they can be employed for experimentation, prediction, and practical control over external objects. However, their peculiarity lies in the necessity of encountering an actual instance of a higher-order object before such a law can be discovered, rendering them unpredictable beforehand. This unpredictability, a distinctive element of Emergentism, is not inherent to emergence itself but arises from the metaphysical irreducibility of emergent properties and the trans-ordinal laws governing them.

A hallmark of the epistemological-cum-metaphysical emergence concept of the 1920s was its departure from the idea that our inability to deduce

emergents from their components is merely contingent and subject to change. Instead, it posited "even-in-principle irreducibility," asserting that not only are contemporary scientists unable to deduce emergents from their components, but even an "archangel" endowed with infinite computational powers would theoretically be incapable of such deduction.

This shift positioned the concept of emergence as both epistemologically and metaphysically irreducible. It was no longer merely about our current limitations in understanding emergent phenomena; it asserted that, in principle, such reduction was impossible. Broad's theory, a significant contribution to this emergentist perspective, is considered secular and reinforces the idea that the deduction of emergents from their components is inherently impossible.

The emergence concept, particularly in the Broadian sense, generated considerable excitement within Western philosophical circles in the early twentieth century. However, its popularity experienced a decline around the mid-century. Brian P. McLaughlin argued that the primary reason for this decline was scientific progress.[8] Shortly after the publication of Broad's *The Mind and Its Place in Nature* (1925), the discovery of quantum mechanics enabled explanations of chemical bonding through electromagnetism, among other advancements. This progress led to the development of molecular biology and the eventual discovery of DNA, which rendered the existence of emergent properties or laws in chemistry and biology highly implausible. It is essential to note that these

[8] McLaughlin, Brian P. "The rise and fall of british emergentism". In *Emergence or Reduction?: Prospects for Nonreductive Physicalism*, eds. Ansgar Beckermann, Hans Flohr & Jaegwin Kim (New York: Walter De Gruyter: 1992), 49-93.

developments did not diminish the plausibility of emergence in the philosophy of mind; however, chemistry and biology constituted the main examples of emergence for most British Emergentists.

Another contributing factor to the decline of interest in emergence was the rise of logical positivism in the 1930s. This philosophical trend, characterized by its anti-metaphysical and hyper-empiricist stance, did not accommodate the allegedly vague concept of emergence within its framework of the sciences.

As previously mentioned, the decline of emergentism can primarily be attributed to two factors: advances in science, particularly in chemistry and biology, and the rise of logical positivism. However, the 1960s witnessed a renewed interest in emergence among philosophers of mind, catalyzed by the rejection of behaviorism during the cognitive revolution. This period reignited the 19th-century debate between identity theorists and dualists. Identity theorists advocate a reductionist and eliminativist stance, positing that the mind is merely a function of the biological brain. In contrast, dualists argue for a clear distinction between the mind and the brain. Emergence emerged as a third alternative, commonly referred to as nonreductive materialism. Nonreductive materialism asserts that mental properties are not reducible to physical ones and may exert causal influence over the physical brain.

In the 1970s, coinciding with a renewed interest in ontologically realist philosophy of science, various interpretations of emergence surfaced. Leading emergentists like Karl Popper, Mario Bunge, Roy Bhaskar, and

Dave Elder-Vass conceived of emergence primarily in an ontological sense, albeit with significant differences in their respective ontologies.

Popper, closest to the Broadian interpretation, emphasized the irreducibility and unpredictability of emergents, combined with a conception-dependent stratified ontology. Although some of his examples suggest an epistemological notion, Popper's framework leans toward ontological emergentism, featuring "downward causation." In this view, consciousness possesses independent causal power, allowing Popper to regard humans as autonomous and free.[9]

Conversely, Bunge critiqued Popper's concept of emergence for conflating epistemology with ontology. He advocated for a strictly ontological definition, separating emergent properties from epistemic considerations such as unpredictability and mystery. Bunge's theory exemplifies what could be termed "purely ontological irreducibility." He argued that it is entirely possible to understand an emergent property and its origins, yet it remains emergent because "explained emergence is no mere resultant." Bunge emphasized that even simple accumulation processes can lead to systems with emergent properties. In his view, the emergence process does not need to be complex or mysterious; for instance, every chemical reaction produces emergent outcomes, and even actions like system breakdown or substitution of parts constitute emergent processes. For Bunge, a property PPP (particular property of a whole) is considered

[9] Karl Popper, *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism* (Londcon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

emergent if it is a property of a whole, rather than its constituent parts, regardless of our understanding of the underlying mechanisms.[10]

Bhaskar's emergence can be viewed as a hybrid approach, critiquing Popper for insufficient attention to mind-independent ontology while emphasizing the connection between ontological emergence and the perceived inability to deduce higher-level features from lower-level laws. His concept of emergentism is central to his philosophy of critical realism, which seeks to transcend the limitations of both positivism and constructivism in understanding reality. In this framework, reality is stratified, consisting of various levels that give rise to emergent properties. While these properties depend on lower-level processes, they cannot be fully explained by them; for example, biological phenomena emerge from chemical processes but cannot be entirely reduced to them.[11]

Bhaskar's emergentism rests on ontological realism, affirming the existence of emergent properties as real, independent features of the world, rather than mere constructs of human perception or social practices. This perspective challenges views that consider such properties as entirely shaped by human cognition or social processes, emphasizing instead their objective existence within the structure of reality.

A key aspect of Bhaskar's theory is that emergent properties possess their own causal powers. When new properties emerge, they do more than reflect underlying processes; they actively influence both their own level

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[10] Mario Bunge, *Emergence and Convergence: Qualitative Novelty and the Unity of Knowledge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).
[11] Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Leeds: Leeds Books, 1975).

and the levels beneath them. This notion is particularly significant in the study of complex systems, where higher-level phenomena, such as consciousness or social structures, can significantly affect the elements from which they originated. The interactions among objects and the amalgamation of their causal potentials can engender entirely novel structures endowed with fresh causal capacities. For instance, water can extinguish fire, even though it is composed of hydrogen and oxygen, both of which have a propensity for combustion.

Bhaskar's ideas have found broad applications across various disciplines, including sociology, biology, and the philosophy of science. They offer a framework for exploring complex systems and social phenomena without resorting to overly simplistic explanations. His emergentism underscores the importance of recognizing the autonomy and causal influence of emergent properties in shaping the dynamic interactions between different levels of reality.

In his work *The Causal Power of Social Structures* (2010), Dave Elder-Vass builds upon Bhaskar's concept of emergence, advocating for a more nuanced ontological perspective.[12] Elder-Vass proposes a relational or compositional theory of emergence, arguing that it robustly supports the notion that entities possess relationally emergent properties and causal powers that are irreducible, without necessitating a commitment to the problematic notion of strong emergence, which implies an irreducible dualism. Instead, Elder-Vass suggests understanding the relationship

[12] Dave Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

between wholes and parts as one of composition rather than mere causation.

He contends that emergence should be viewed as a relation among causal mechanisms, entities, their composition, and resulting properties, rather than as existing between radically different or completely autonomous levels of reality. Elder-Vass's relational argument for emergence promotes a specific and restrained form of reductionism. He characterizes "higher-level entities" as composed of relatively stable organizations, configurations, or assemblies of "lower-level entities" that can exert causal influence due to their arrangement, while still being irreducible to the mere sum of their parts.

This approach introduces a crucial distinction between explanatory and eliminative forms of reductionism. While higher-level properties can be scientifically explained in terms of lower-level processes, they are not thereby eliminated. In this view, emergence is a synchronic relation that endows wholes with specific abilities, properties, and causal effects as a result of the organization or composition of their parts.

Understanding the properties of wholes necessitates a comprehension of the properties of their constituent parts and how these parts are organized into wholes. As a result, wholes acquire unique powers and capacities through this process that they would not possess if their parts were not organized in specific ways. Although we can analyze social structures in terms of the relations and organization of their parts, this does not imply that social structures can be entirely eliminated from explanations of social behavior or that society can be reduced to individuals. Social structures are recognized to possess causal powers of their own, derived from the

combination and interaction of agents—the relations that constitute them—which are inherently distinct from the causal powers of those same agents in other configurations. Thus, the new powers and properties that emerge must be attributed to the structures themselves rather than solely to the individual agents.

The evolution from Bhaskar to Elder-Vass reflects a shift in the conceptualization of structure from a language of stratification to one of composition and interaction. For Elder-Vass, the challenge lies in moving away from "monolithic" concepts of social structure and toward understanding the causal powers of specific social groups and "norm circles."

There are various approaches to the concept of emergence in the social world and its application in social analysis. Bhaskar adopts a strong concept of emergence, emphasizing stratification and the complex relationships among social strata, which may risk oversimplifying social structures. In contrast, Elder-Vass employs a compositional model, which is weaker yet sufficient to explain social causation, focusing on organization and groups, potentially overlooking deeper structural possibilities.

While these views may seem conflicting, is it necessary to choose between them? Could different social phenomena exhibit varying degrees of emergence, requiring different conceptual tools based on context? Emergence itself might be stratified, differentiated, and context-bound. Therefore, considering emergence in the social world could benefit from a both-and approach rather than an either-or.

Emergentist Approaches to the Micro-Macro Link

"Emergentist approaches to the micro-macro link" are rooted in sociology, addressing the relationship between individual actions (micro-level) and larger social structures and patterns (macro-level). This approach seeks to bridge the gap between individual behavior and collective societal outcomes by focusing on emergent properties—phenomena that arise from individual interactions but cannot be fully understood by examining those individuals alone. Emergentist theories emphasize that social structures and patterns are not simply aggregates of individual actions but represent higher-order properties that shape and constrain individual behavior in return.

Emergence has captivated scholars across disciplines, especially those studying complex systems. A fundamental insight from complexity theory is that the behavior of a system cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts—an insight social emergentists have applied to the analysis of society. Individuals participate in intricate, interdependent relationships that generate collective phenomena, such as institutions, norms, or cultural patterns, which operate beyond individual intentions. Social emergentists refer to these collective outcomes as "social emergence," highlighting the dynamic relationship between individual actions and macro-level structures—what is often called the "micro-macro link."[13] Although individual actions generate these emergent patterns, the resulting structures acquire an independent causal power that influences future individual actions.

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[13] Sawyer, *Social Emergence: Societies As Complex Systems*, 63.