

Social Emergence

Can we understand important social issues by studying individual personalities, decisions, and behaviors? Or are societies somehow more than the people in them? Sociologists have long believed that the study of individual decisions and behaviors cannot fully explain the complex social phenomena that emerge when people interact in organizations, institutions, and societies. In contrast, most psychologists and economists tend to treat social phenomena as if they were reducible to the actions of individuals, whose independent choices can simply be added together to explain complex social processes.

Social Emergence takes a new approach to these long-standing questions. Sawyer argues that societies are complex dynamical systems and that the best way to resolve these debates is by developing the concept of emergence, focusing on multiple levels of analysis – individuals, interactions, and groups – and on how social group phenomena emerge from communication processes among individual members. This book makes a unique contribution not only to complex systems research but also to social theory.

R. KEITH SAWYER is Associate Professor of Education at Washington University. He is the author or editor of six previous books, including *Group Creativity* and *Improvised Dialogues*. He has also published a wide range of scholarly journal articles on contemporary issues in sociological theory and on computational modeling of societies.

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R. Keith Sawyer
Washington University



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Some of the chapters in this book draw heavily from articles that have appeared elsewhere, and this material appears with permission. However, all material has been substantially rewritten, in some cases to such a degree that its origin is unrecognizable. Consequently, this book should be considered to supersede the following five articles:

- Sawyer, R. Keith. 2001. “Emergence in sociology: Contemporary philosophy of mind and some implications for sociological theory.” *American Journal of Sociology* 107:551–85.
- Sawyer, R. Keith. 2002. “Durkheim’s dilemma: Toward a sociology of emergence.” *Sociological Theory* 20:227–47.
- Sawyer, R. Keith. 2002. “Emergence in psychology: Lessons from the history of non-reductionist science.” *Human Development* 45:2–28.
- Sawyer, R. Keith. 2002. “Unresolved tensions in sociocultural theory: Analogies with contemporary sociological debates.” *Culture and Psychology* 8:283–305.
- Sawyer, R. Keith. 2003. “Artificial societies: Multi agent systems and the micro-macro link in sociological theory.” *Sociological Methods and Research* 31:37–75.