The concept of *emergence* in sociology: perspectives and problems.
Jeroen Van Bouwel, *Ghent University* (Belgium).

Recently the philosophical concept of *emergence* has been used in sociology to understand and defend social causation and nonreductive individualism (e.g., Sawyer, 2001, 2003 and forthcoming). In this paper, I want to analyse how the concept of *emergence* helps us illuminating the individual-collective relation in sociology, paying attention to the analogies with philosophy of mind. Subsequently, some questions will be raised about Keith Sawyer’s use of emergence in his defence of sociological explanation. Therefore, it will be important to distinguish ontological from epistemological emergence. Where Sawyer focuses on ontological emergence, I will argue that sociological explanation might better be defended by putting emphasis on pragmatic aspects of explanation (cf., Van Bouwel, 2004; Van Bouwel and Weber, 2002) and considering emergence as an epistemological category.

References


