

Monday  
24 March 2014  
7:30 pm  
In English

Can we say that living beings are radically new entities emerging from interacting molecules, or are they only apparently new and autonomous with respect to their molecular constituents? Can we say that wholes are really more than their parts, or is this only an appearance? The talk will employ a non-conventional approach to address such issues of the emergence of new levels of organization out of their so-called « basic » constituents. To begin with, wholes and parts or higher and basic levels of organization will be defined as targets for global and local modes of access, instead of ascribing an intrinsic existence to them. This being granted, modes of access will be supposed to be constitutive of patterns of organization, in Kant's sense, instead of being mere instruments for revealing them. Similarly, inter-level causation will be considered as objective in the sense of transcendental epistemology, instead of being torn apart between a strongly ontological and weakly epistemological status. This neo-Kantian approach defuses several paradoxes associated with the concept of downward causation, and enables one to make good sense of it independently of any prejudice about a hierarchy of levels of being.

**Michel Bitbol** is Directeur de Recherche at the CNRS in Paris, France. He is presently based at the Archives Husserl, a centre of research in phenomenology. He worked as a research scientist in biophysics from 1978 to 1990. From 1990 onwards, he turned to the philosophy of physics. He edited texts by Erwin Schrödinger and developed a neo-Kantian philosophy of quantum mechanics. Besides, he has drawn a parallel between Buddhist dependent arising and the concept of non-supervenient relations, in quantum physics and the theory of knowledge. In 1997 he received an award from the *Academie des sciences morales et politiques* for his work in the philosophy of quantum mechanics. Later on, he studied the relations between the philosophy of physics and the philosophy of mind, working in close collaboration with Francisco Varela. He is presently developing a conception of consciousness inspired from neurophenomenology, and an epistemology of first-person knowledge. His most recent book is entitled *La conscience a-t-elle une origine?* (Does consciousness have an origin?).

The lecture is part of the **ICI Lecture Series Constituting Wholes II**, which seeks to re-examine the critical potential of notions of wholeness by exploring the double movement in constituting wholes. How are wholes and other forms of association differently constituted and how do they constitute their parts or elements? How can one maintain a critical position towards persistent wholes without making them inescapable and foreclosing the possibility of reducing violence and arriving at more benign forms of association? Conversely, how can one be attuned to heterogeneities and potentialities without participating in the reparation of existing structures of domination?

Conceived within the framework of the multidisciplinary ICI Research Focus **Constituting Wholes**, the lecture series will address and debate these and similar questions from a variety of perspectives.

# Michel Bitbol

## From Wholes to Parts: A Relational Model of Downward Causation

