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Institutions as rules & the evolving biocultural power of collective action

Dr David Beech CPsychol

Organisational Psychologist – Social Psychology of Collective Action

Salford Law & People Management

Salford Business School

d.beech@salford.ac.uk

Abstract

In order to understand how human collective action is motivated, coordinated, governed and evolved an original framework of biocultural power is proposed. Biocultural power is the language enabled human capacity to produce, reproduce and evolve the cultural representations and institutional rules that constitute and regulate the capacity to choose to do things together that could not be done alone.

This paper proposes that biocultural power involves interactions between a range of interdependent and interpenetrating components that can be grouped into five broad categories: human actors and their attributes practices and outcomes; material conditions and artefacts; collective action configurations; institutional rules; cultural representations. As with other animals interaction among humans produces collective action configurations and game equilibria. Perhaps unique to human beings interaction produces first, joint intentionality and second, and decisively, collective intentionality and cultural representations (Tomasello, 2014).

As argued by Searle (1995; 2010), with supporting empirical evidence from Tomasello, the constitutive and regulative rules of language are the foundational institution of the human species. Institutions are evolving systems of established rules that enable and constrain human life, e.g., language and marriage.

The meaning of language is created – meaning is constituted – through the collective intentionality and cultural representations of human beings and enables the creation of new institutions. For example, the institution of marriage is constituted via language, initially sanctioning a relationship – interactive practices – between a woman and a man, governed by community laws. And laws are constituted by collective intentionality and associated cultural representations. Changes in cultural representations about the meaning of marriage have resulted in changes in institutional rules constituting and regulating marriage in some polities, enabling the preferences and interactive practices of two adults of the same gender to be accorded the status of marriage. Thus, the proposed framework supports conceptualisation of institutions as constitutive and as regulative rules, and goes beyond Hindricks and Guala's (2015) conceptualisation of institutions as rules-in-equilibrium.

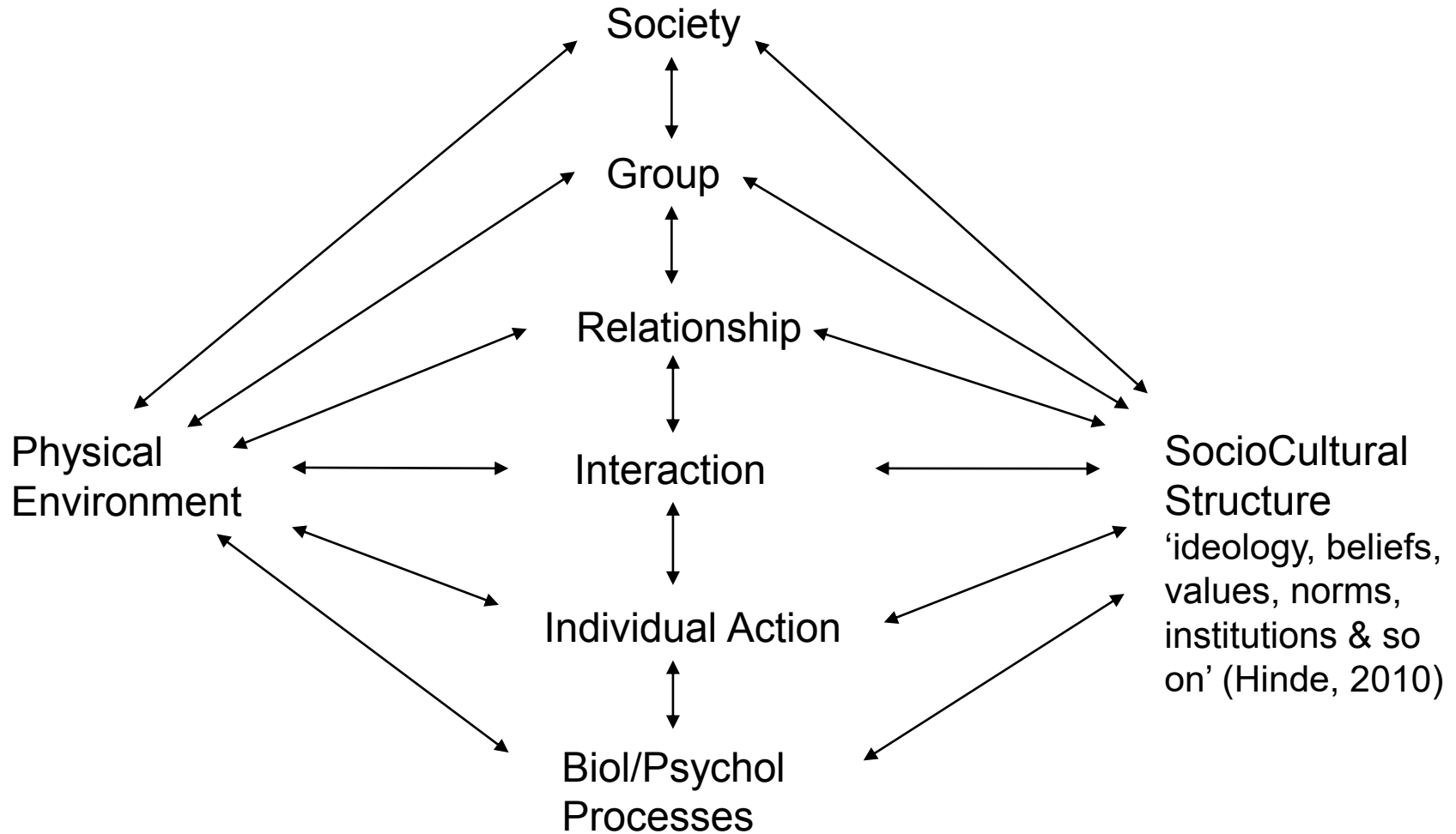
Institutional Rules & Biocultural Power

- **Ongoing Research Interest since 1972**
 - 1972: What citizen based governance principles & practices are appropriate for harnessing the economic power of corporations?
 - 2008 (Gomez & Korine): which is grounded in sovereign rights to possess, use & dispose of property.
- **Research Focus since 2012**
 - How is the collective action of the group living individuals of the human species motivated, coordinated, governed and evolved?
 - And what are the implications for quality of life, competitive productivity, sustainable ecosystems, and adaptive innovation?

Agenda

- Hinde & the prospects for Biocultural Science
- Regularities of Observable Things (game theory) & of Social Representations (Moscovici): behaviour & social cognition
- Game theory requires a [cognitive] theory of preference formation (Hausman + Searle)
- Tomasello (+ Searle) & some foundations for Biocultural Science: collective intentionality
- The Structure of Biocultural Power – a general framework for Biocultural Science
 - Five categories of interdependent components
 - Collective mental phenomena (Searle) & behavioural regularities (Hindriks & Guala)
 - Application to governance (Lukes & Dahl)

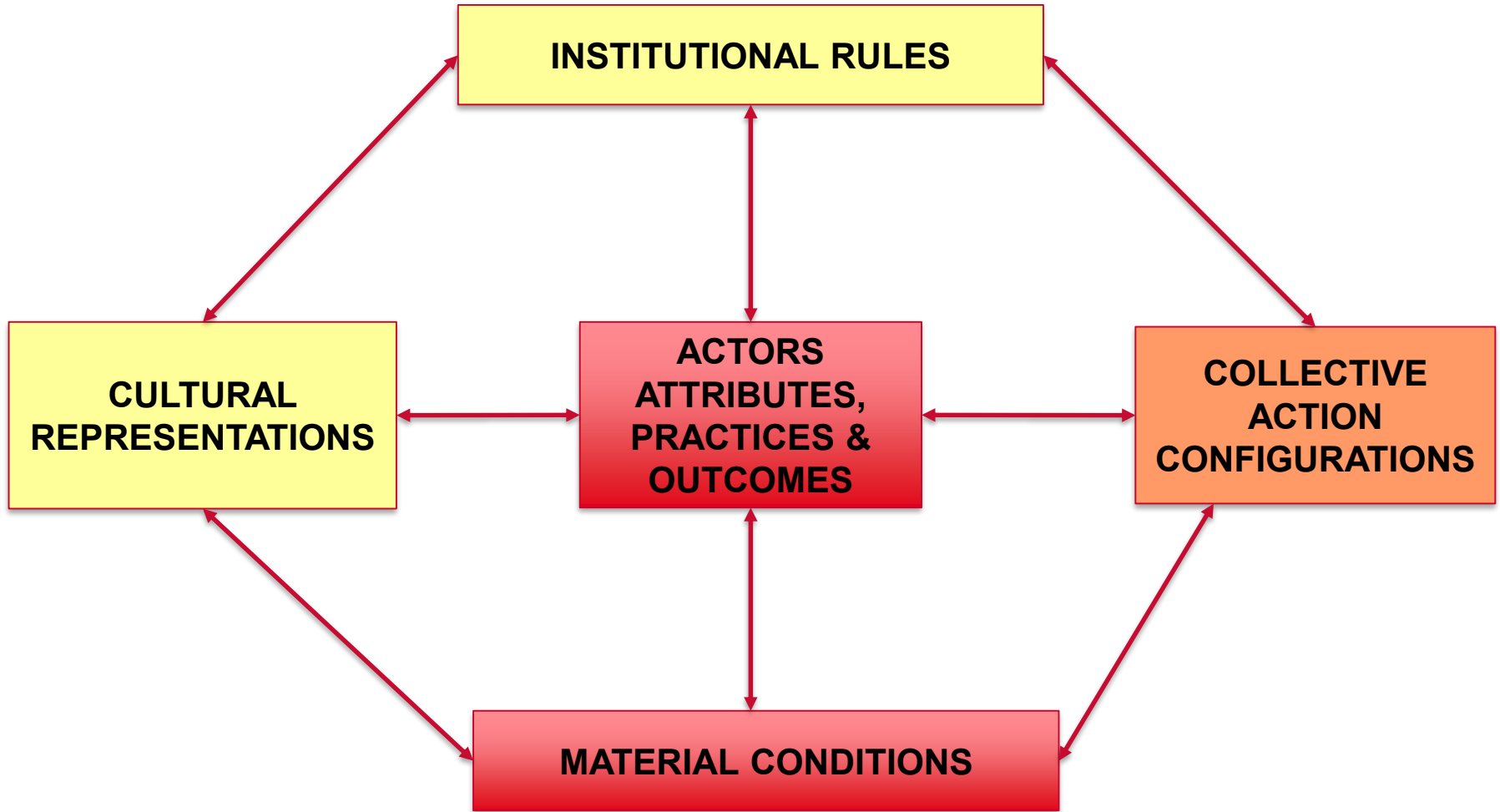
A unified basis for biology & social science: Biocultural Science?



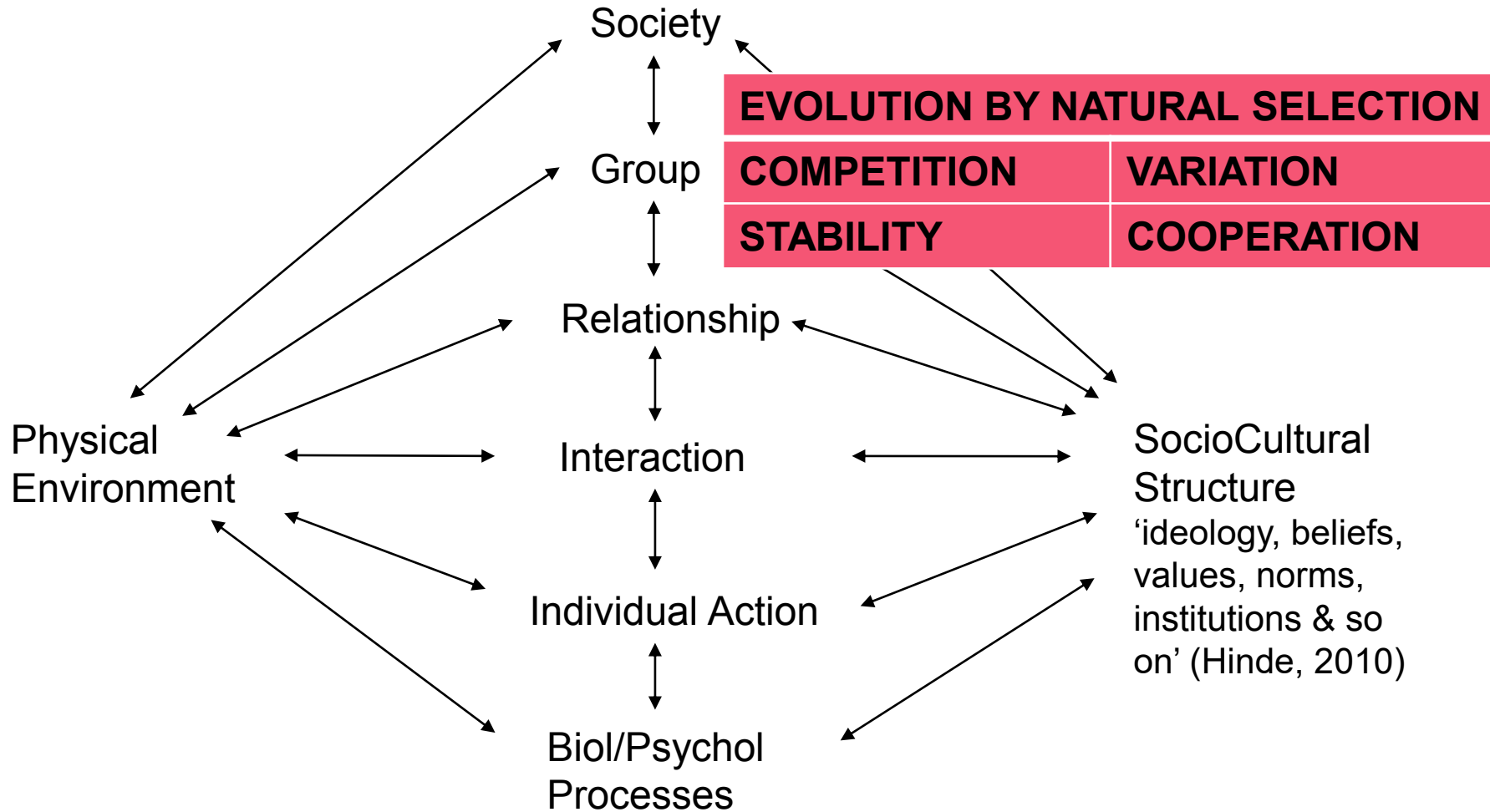
The dialectical relations between levels of social complexity

Source: adapted from behavioural biologist Hinde, 1991; 2010

The structure of biocultural power



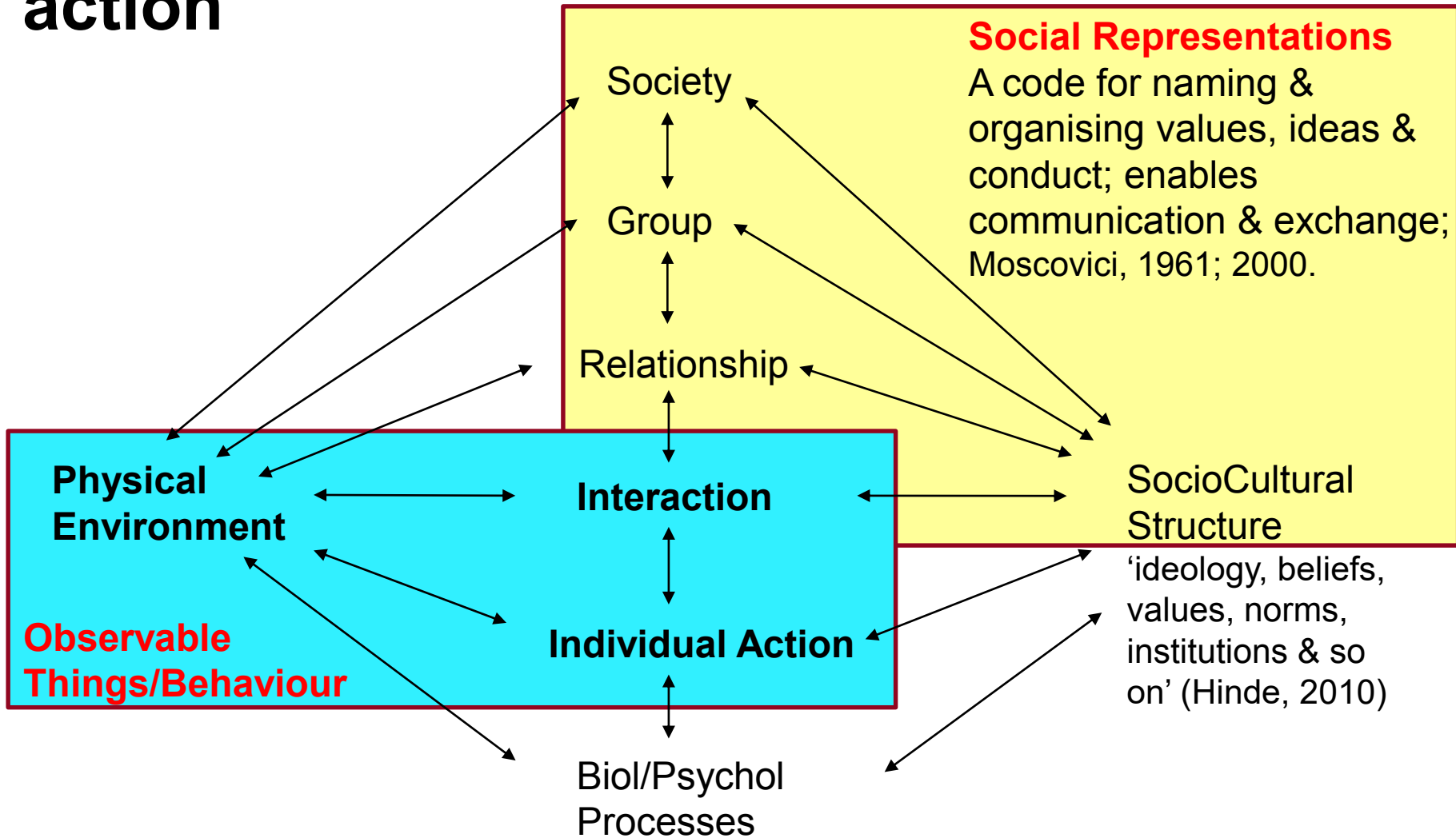
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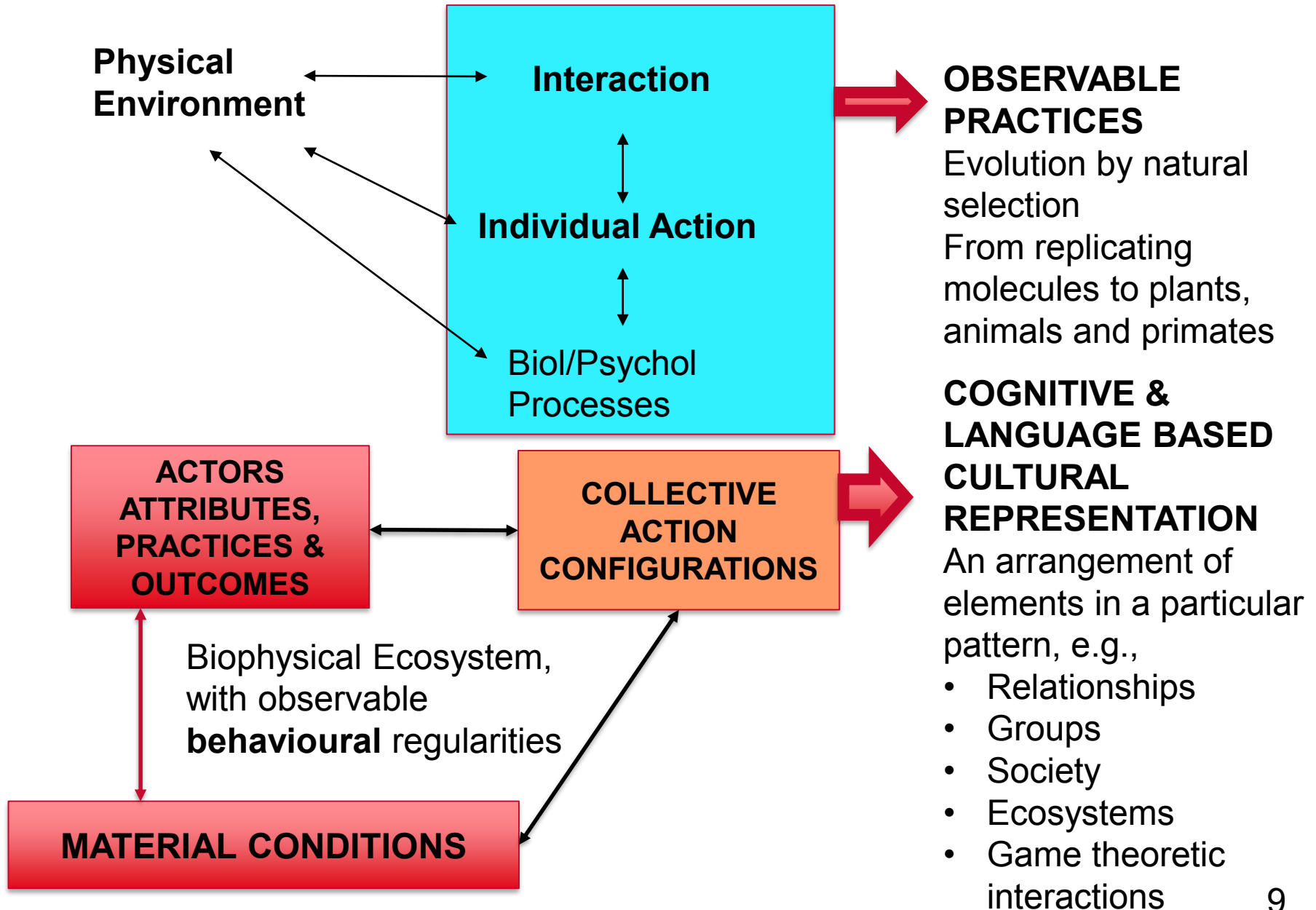
The group living context for biocultural action



The dialectical relations between levels of social complexity

Source: adapted from behavioural biologist Hinde, 1991; 2010

Objective Ontology & Objective Epistemology of Biophysical Action



Game Theory & Desire & Belief Based Preferences

Hausman, 2012, Preference, Value, Choice, and Welfare

- Game theory rests on “a tacit theory of preference formation.” p53
- “Game theory takes over only *after* preferences over comprehensive outcomes are specified.” p54
- [The tacit theory] “is a fragment of an unacknowledged and largely undeveloped theory of preference formation that economists need [in order to be able] to define what games people are playing and to apply game theory.” p54
- Preferences are “subjective total comparative evaluations and hence [the] outcomes of a deliberative process” p136 (Conclusions)

Searle, 2001, Rationality in Action

- “Rational deliberation must begin with a well-ordered preference schedule.” p30. [However] “A well-ordered set of preferences is typically the *result* of successful deliberation, and not its *precondition*. Which do I prefer, to be in Berkeley or Paris? Well, I would have to think about it.” p30-31.

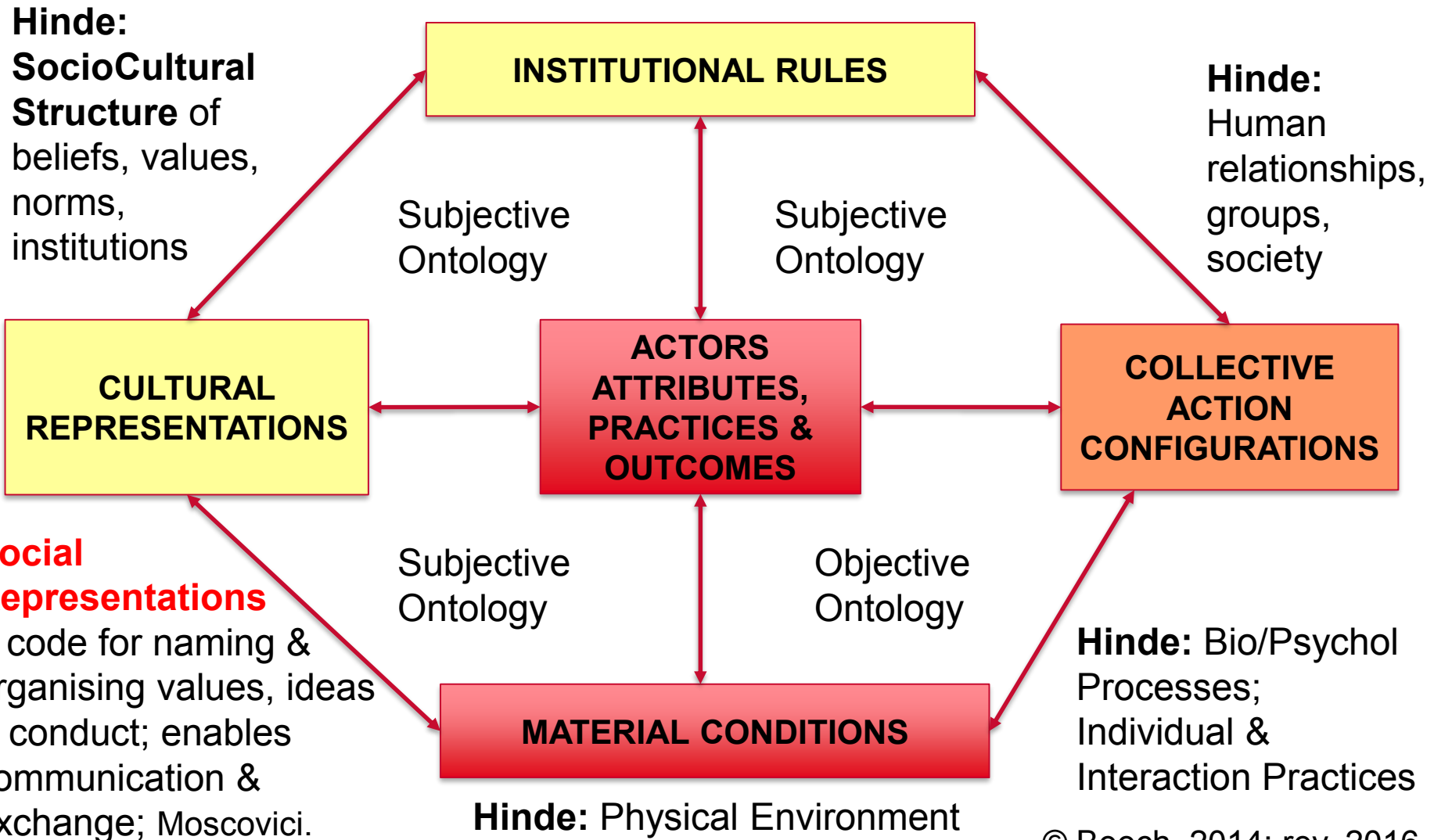
From biological to biocultural action

Human thinking – preference formation - is for cooperative action

COGNITIVE PROCESS	INDIVIDUAL INTENTIONALITY	JOINT INTENTIONALITY	COLLECTIVE INTENTIONALITY
INTERACT & COMMUNICATE	Competitive Intentional	Dual-Level Collaboration Cooperative e.g., Gestures	Group Minded Culture Conventional i.e., Language
REPRESENTATION	Schema/Images of Situation	Able to represent perspective of a known & specific other	Conventional & Epistemically Objective
INFERENCE	Cause & Effect Intentional Inferences	Recursive Intentional Inferences	Reflective Reasoned Inferences
SELF-MONITORING	Monitor own decision making process	Regulate own actions from perspective of a specific cooperative partner Monitor own & second personal decision making process	Regulate own actions from perspective of a generalised other Normative self governance
Source: Tomasello, 2014			

The structure of biocultural power

Mostly subjective ontology; & objective epistemology



ONTOLOGY EPISTEMOLOGY	OBJECTIVE	SUBJECTIVE
OBJECTIVE	REALIST POSITIVISM	REALIST CONSTRUCTIVISM
SUBJECTIVE	SKEPTICISM	RELATIVISM

Hinde:
SocioCultural
Structure of
beliefs, values,
norms,
institutions

Hinde:
Human
relationships,
groups,
society

INSTITUTIONAL RULES

Subjective
Ontology

Subjective
Ontology

**CULTURAL
REPRESENTATIONS**

**ACTORS
ATTRIBUTES,
PRACTICES &
OUTCOMES**

**COLLECTIVE
ACTION
CONFIGURATIONS**

Subjective
Ontology

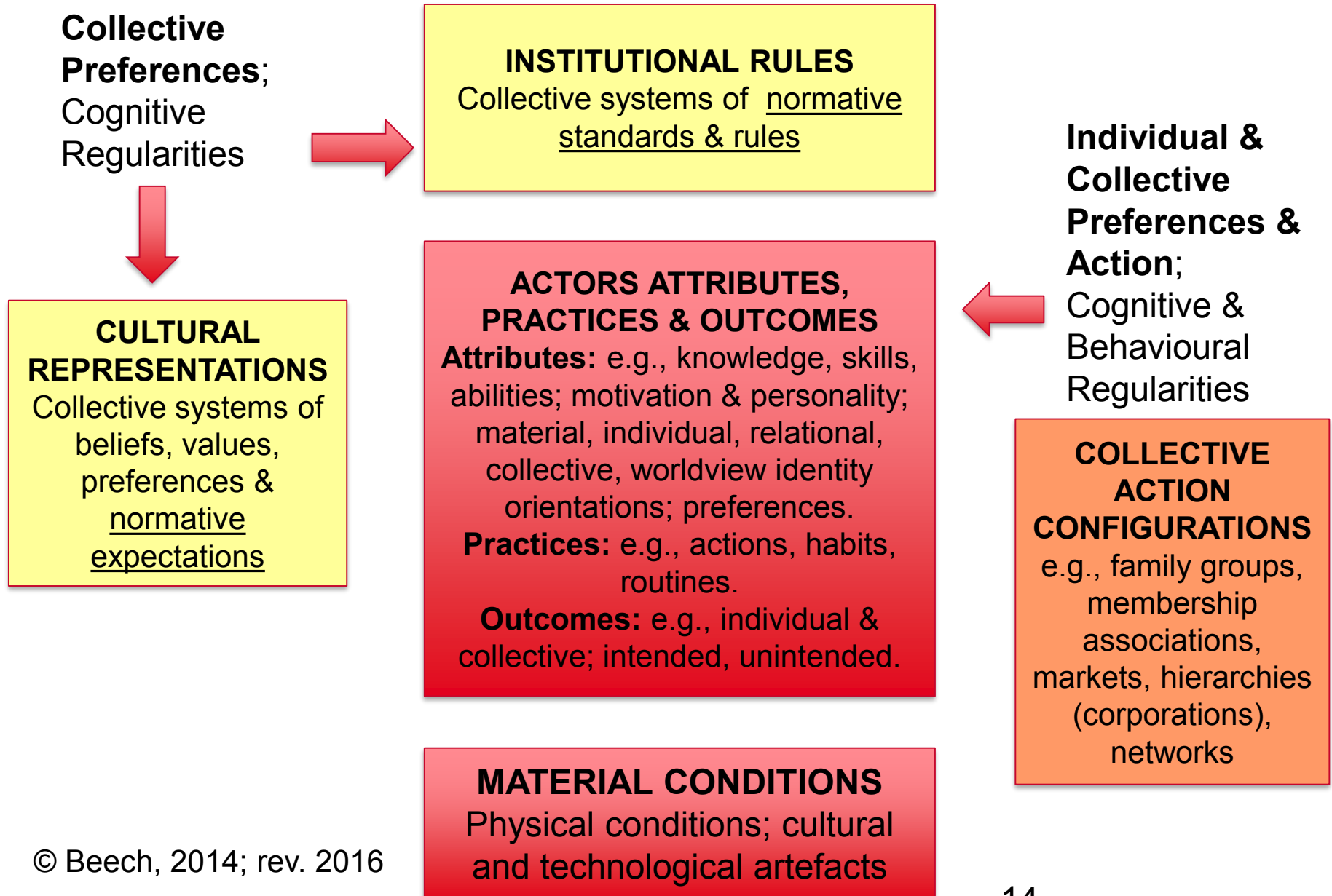
Objective
Ontology

**Social
Representations**
A code for naming &
organising values, ideas
& conduct; enables
communication &
exchange; Moscovici.

MATERIAL CONDITIONS

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The structure of biocultural power



- “An institution is a system of **constitutive rules**” Searle, 2010
 - X, land, counts as Y, property in C, this jurisdiction
 - Property constituted by collective intentionality
- “Institutions are the **[regulative] rules** that people are motivated [have an incentive] to follow” Guala, 2016
 - i) **Base rule**: If X, land north of the river is Y, Nuer property*; and, ii) **Status rule**: if Y, the land is Nuer property* then, Z, the Nuer graze it. Guala, pp64-65
 - Rule in equilibrium constituted by behavioural regularity
- How did the Nuer and the Dinka accept/agree/recognise it is Nuer property?
 - You got there first, it’s yours? I’ll fight you for it? Might is right!
- The concept of property is a collective mental phenomenon which is declared to be an institutional fact, not a behavioural correlated regularity represented as a rule in equilibrium

The structure of biocultural power: Lukes & Dahl

