

Structure & Agency

Sociology

The discipline's central argument, and the attempts to dissolve it.

Structure first

- Patterns exist before any individual
- Constraint precedes and shapes choice
- Durkheim, Parsons, structural Marxism
- Explains regularity across whole populations
- Risk: actors become dupes with no choice

Agency first

- Structure exists only as people enact it
- Meaning and interpretation drive conduct
- Weber, interactionism, ethnomethodology
- Explains variation, resistance and change
- Risk: the field of constraint disappears

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Giddens' duality: structure is both medium and outcome of action.
Bourdieu's habitus and Archer's morphogenesis are rival

None of the syntheses is agreed. Treat the tension as a live problem you take a position on, not a solved one.