

Structure, agency, and the internal conversation

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Abstrak

The central problem of social theory is 'structure and agency'. How do the objective features of society influence human agents? Determinism is not the answer, nor is conditioning as currently conceptualised. It accentuates the way structure and culture shape the social context in which individuals operate, but it neglects our personal capacity to define what we care about most and to establish a modus vivendi expressive of our concerns. Through inner dialogue, 'the internal conversation', individuals reflect upon their social situation in the light of current concerns and projects. On the basis of a series of unique, in-depth interviews, Archer identifies three distinctive forms of internal conversation. These govern agents' responses to social conditioning, their individual patterns of social mobility and whether or not they contribute to social stability or change. Thus the internal conversation is seen as being the missing link between society and the individual, structure and agency.