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The relationship of social structure to individual and collective agency has been central to sociology from the outset. It remains so in period in which poststructuralists have challenged the idea of stable social structures and even the usefulness in social science of the concept of structure itself. The historical trajectory of the debate about the respective importance of structure and agency and the relationship between the two provides the narrative context of this collection of articles.

The point of arranging this collection of articles predominantly in historical sequence is not simply a matter of convenience. Historical context has a major impact on forming the concerns of sociologists and, equally significantly, on the way they perceive and theorise the social world.

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