

Structuralism

[Philosophy](#)



Structuralism originated in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent Prague and Moscow schools of linguistics. [1] Just as structural linguistics was facing serious challenges from the likes of Noam Chomsky and thus fading in importance in linguistics, structuralism appeared in academia in the second half of the 20th century and grew to become one of the most popular approaches in academic fields concerned with the analysis of language, culture, and society.

The structuralist mode of reasoning has been applied in a diverse range of fields, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, and architecture. The most famous thinkers associated with structuralism include the linguist Roman Jakobson, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, and the literary critic Roland Barthes. [1] As an intellectual movement, structuralism came to take existentialism's pedestal in 1960s France. [2] Structuralism argues that a specific domain of culture may be understood by means of a structure—modelled on language—that is distinct both from the organisations of reality and those of ideas or the imagination—the "third order".

In Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, for example, the structural order of "the Symbolic" is distinguished both from "the Real" and "the Imaginary"; similarly, in Althusser's Marxist theory, the structural order of the capitalist mode of production is distinct both from the actual, real agents involved in its relations and from the ideological forms in which those relations are understood. According to Alison Assiter, four ideas are common to the

various forms of structuralism. First, that a structure determines the position of each element of a whole.

Second, that every system has a structure. Third, structural laws deal with co-existence rather than change. Fourth, structures are the "real things" that lie beneath the surface or the appearance of meaning. [4] In the 1970s, structuralism was criticised for its rigidity and ahistoricism. Despite this, many of structuralism's proponents, such as Jacques Lacan, continue to assert an influence on continental philosophy and many of the fundamental assumptions of some of structuralism's critics (who have been associated with "post-structuralism") are a continuation of structuralism. [2]