



Introduction to Theory in Social Work

From paradigmatic fields to theories in Social Work

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What do we mean by social work theories?

- Besides its uses and purposes, what is its nature and how it relates with broader paradigms and currents of thought in social theory?
- Paradigms of knowledge are influential for all science production and a common heritage among social sciences

Thomas Kuhn:

“A paradigm is a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done (and) how results should be interpreted.”

In Bryman, 2012: 630

- It might be argued that:



- Two substantive and overarching debates throughout social sciences:

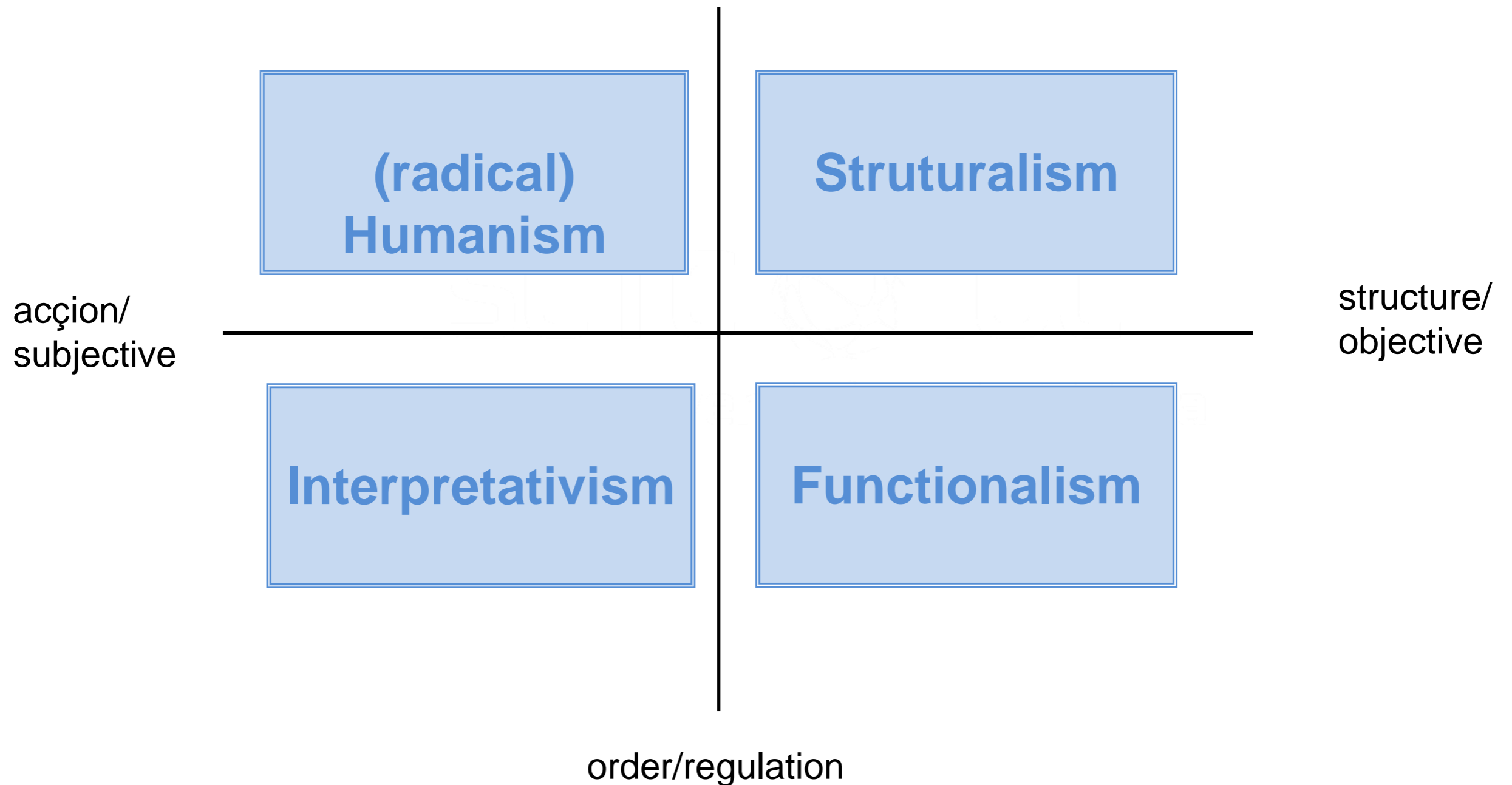
- **Structure vs Action**

- **Conflict vs Order**

- these debates are deeply influential of how Social Work thinks about itself and its action and of how professional purposes are defined

➔ Paradigmatic fields in Social Work

conflict/change



Source own elaboration, departing from Howe, 1987

Order and regulation perspectives

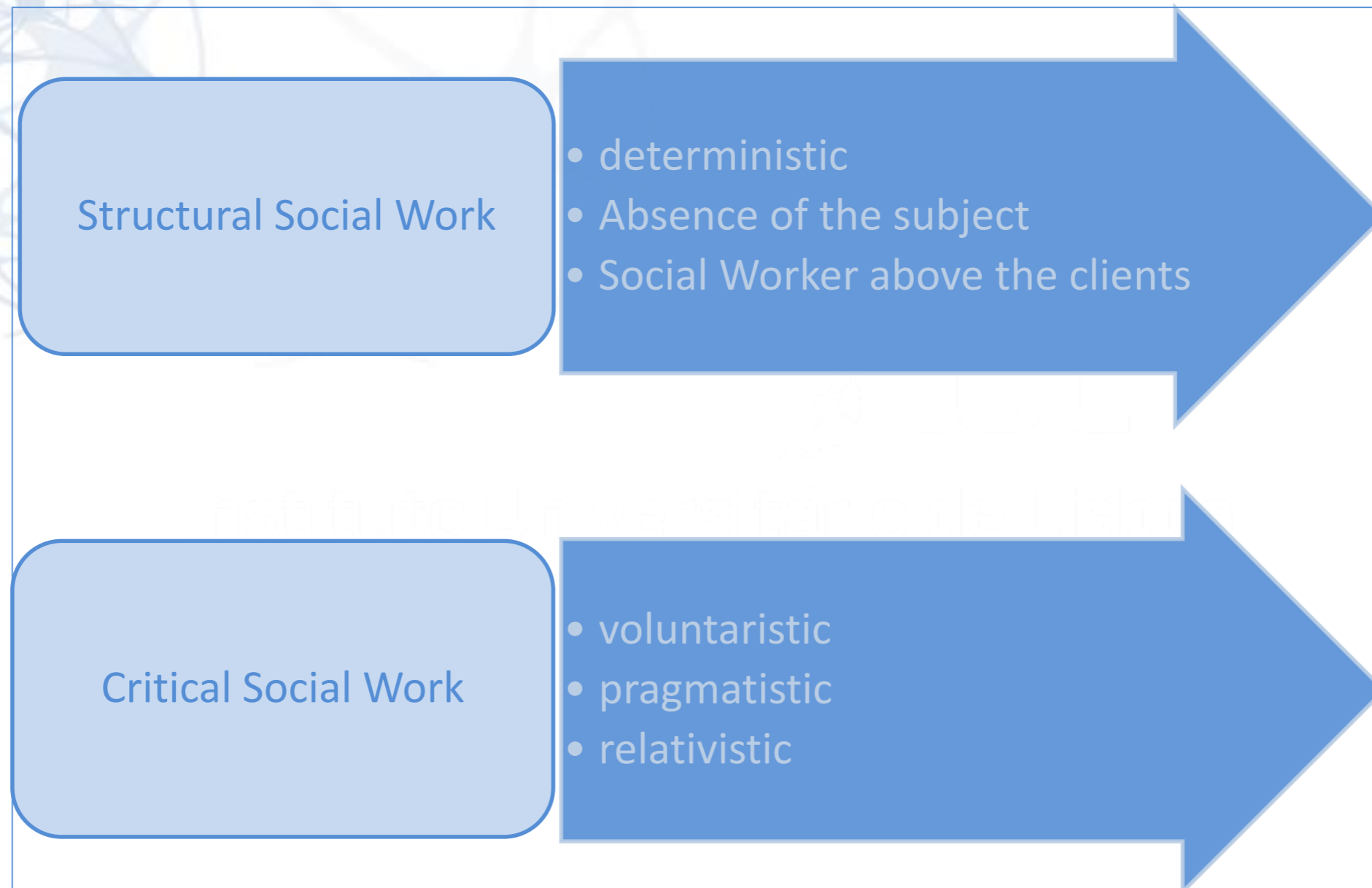
- Point to more classical and conservative visions of Social Work, which are currently identified with Social Work institutionalisation, but are still in use (and sometimes with renewed approaches) in present practices
- Social workers as a neutral agent aiming at
 - The preservation/maintenance of existing society
 - The cooperation between subjects and the system

Conflict and change perspectives

- Correspond to more recent and still in progress approaches to social work theory
- Include what is usually meant by alternative, critical and radical approaches in Social Work



Some arguments against change and conflict perspectives





Some clues for Social Work theory in times of complexity

- Social Work beyond conflict and regulation approaches?
- Mediation (agents/structure; forces and interests, etc.) as an important role for contemporary Social Work
- Non-negotiable areas: who to stand for; aims and purposes; absolute values and rights
- challenging

[• clinic	perspectives of practice
	• technocratic	
	• mechanistic	
	• individualistic	



Radicality of the critic and realism of the action

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