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Social Construction: Orienting Principles



Thoughts from Kenneth J. Gergen

What does it mean to carry out work in a social constructionist frame? This is a topic of broad discussion, and it is important to resist the temptation of a conclusion. However, I thought it would be useful for these discussions to develop more systematically some of the views that lie somewhere toward the center of what we do. I invite others to elaborate, amend, or question:

We live in worlds of meaning. We understand and value the world and ourselves in ways that emerge from our personal history and shared culture.

Worlds of meaning are intimately related to action. We act largely in terms of what we interpret to be real, rational, satisfying, and good. Without meaning there would be little worth doing.

Worlds of meaning are constructed within relationships. What we take to be real and rational is given birth in relationships. Without relationship there would be little of meaning.

New worlds of meaning are possible. We are not possessed or determined by the past. We may abandon or dissolve dysfunctional ways of life, and together create alternatives.

To sustain what is valuable, or to create new futures, requires participation in relationships. If we damage or destroy relations, we lose the capacity to sustain a way of life, and to create new futures.

When worlds of meaning intersect, creative outcomes may occur. New forms of relating, new realities, and new possibilities may all emerge.

When worlds of meaning conflict, they may lead to alienation and aggression, thus undermining relations and their creative potential.

Through creative care for relationships, the destructive potentials of conflict may be reduced, or transformed.

The preceding understandings do not constitute beliefs. They are neither true nor false. They are ways of approaching life that, for many, hold great promise.

*As we generate meaning together
we create the future.*