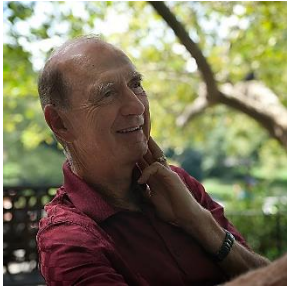


Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

April 2020



Crisis, Collaboration and the Communiverse

By Kenneth J. Gergen, Taos Institute President

We all share in the adversity and anguish of the times. Yet this common sharing has also brought with it an acute consciousness of connection. How often do we find ourselves re-connecting with friends, relatives and colleagues from the past, and how sweet these affirmations of relationship are. We also witness inspiring acts of caring across communities and countries. As many see it, we are realizing as never before the profound ways in which we are all related. We may exalt in the sense of global communion, but now what?

I ask this question because the present crisis is a potent wake-up call for the future. Developments in technology are generating the conditions for increasingly rapid global change, thus unleashing potentials of staggering and unpredictable force. And this is to say nothing of the devastating impact of climate change. Even now scientists are discovering that the melting of arctic ice will release bacteria and viruses from long past. In effect, the future of global well-being is at hand!

Where, then, are the guardians of the common good, those individuals or institutions possessing mankind's mandate to deliberate and mobilize for the good of all? To be sure, we have long realized the need for such guardians, but the meager residual provided from the past is the United Nations. Yet, even the UN is an ineffectual guardian of the common good, given that its members are chiefly pursuing the self-interests of the governments they represent.

Importantly, we must ask, how could it be otherwise? We generally understand the world in terms of bounded units - individual persons, families, communities, organizations, nations, and the like. Isn't it common sense that such units are chiefly invested in their own well-being? Caring for the other is applauded; caring for the whole is exotic.

Let us then abandon the logic of bounded units. Let us instead pursue the vision of a world of relational process, a world in which there is no fundamental separation between persons and environment, but a communiverse responsible for the very possibility of life itself. Whether this possibility is realized depends on our care for the communiverse.

I marvel at the kind of work in which so many who are connected with the Taos Institute are engaged. Created and shared are practices bringing people together in generative ways. These are practices of collaboration, coordination, conflict reduction, collective creativity, and the like. All contribute to the well-being of relational process.

Is this sufficient? If global well-being hangs in the balance can we rest easy in our locally focused efforts - an organization here, a school system there, and so on? I would love to think so, but history is not on our side. How can we, then, scale up these attempts, so as to transform our current institutions of governance, and foster new institutions for the ultimate care of the communiverse? This profound challenge lies before us.