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The social construction of what?

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Abstrak

Social construction is one of very many ideas that are bitterly fought over in the American culture wars. Combatants may find my observations rather like the United Nations resolutions that have little effect. But a lot of other people are curious about the fray going on in the distance. They are glad to hear from a foreign correspondent, not about the wars, but about an idea that has been cropping up all over the place. Ihave seldom found it helpful to use the phrase ??social construction?? in my own work. When Ihave mentioned it Ihave done so in order to distance myself from it. It seemed to be both obscure and overused. Social construction has in many contexts been a truly liberating idea, but that which on first hearing has liberated some has made all too many others smug, comfortable, and trendy in ways that have become merely orthodox. The phrase has become code. If you use it favorably, you deem yourself rather radical. If you trash the phrase, you declare that you are rational, reasonable, and respectable. Iused to believe that the best way to contribute to the debates was to remain silent. To talk about them would entrench the use of the phrase ??social construction.?? My attitude was irresponsible. Philosophers of my stripe should analyze, not exclude. Even in the narrow domains called the history and the philosophy of the sciences, observers see a painful schism. Many historians and many philosophers won?t talk to each other, or else they talk past each other, because one side is so contentiously ??constructionist?? while the other is so dismissive of the idea. In larger arenas, public scientists shout at sociologists, who shout back. You almost forget that there are issues to discuss. Ihave tried to get some perspective on established topics in the field. More interesting are some openings to new ideas that have not yet been examined.