

The Social Construction of Reality

Berger and Luckmann are key developers of the second emphasis of the sociology of knowledge:

Proposition #2: Reality is socially constructed by knowledges

This proposition asserts that social reality is not a social fact in its own right, but is something produced and communicated, its meaning derived in and through these systems of communication.

Key books

Berger & Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966)

Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (1969): summarizes perspective and applies to religion

Berger's *Invitation to Sociology* (1963)

Major emphasis:

Humans are a product of society and society is a product of humans.

Three steps in the social construction of reality

1. Externalization: the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of people

2. Objectivation: attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves (institutionalization)

3. Internalization: the reappropriation of humans of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness (socialization)

World-Maintenance

Socially constructed worlds are precarious—constantly threatened by human self-interest, stupidity and forgetfulness—and require world-maintenance.

Three key processes in world-maintenance: socialization, social control, legitimation.

Legitimation: second-order knowledge that explains and justifies social order; answers “why” questions

May be as simple as proverbs or involve complex bodies of knowledge (e.g., theology, psychology)

Therapy: involves using legitimations to keep actual or potential deviants within institutionalized definitions of reality